

A Preparation for Confession

Examination of Conscience

Prior to approaching a priest for confession and absolution, in the silence of the heart, the penitent should perform an examination of conscience in order to ensure proper preparation and a thorough confession.

While there are many methods of preparing for confession, many find the fourth chapter of the Rule of our holy Father Benedict to be particularly helpful.

Chapter IV - The Instruments of Good Works

1. First of all, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.
2. Then, to love your neighbour as yourself.
3. Next, not to kill.
4. Not to commit adultery.
5. Not to steal.
6. Not to covet.
7. Not to bear false witness.

8. To honour all people.
9. Not to do to another what one would not have done to oneself.
10. To deny oneself in order to follow Christ.
11. To chastise the body.
12. Not to seek after luxuries.
13. To love fasting.
14. To refresh the poor.
15. To clothe the naked.
16. To visit the sick.
17. To bury the dead.
18. To help in affliction.
19. To console the sorrowing.
20. To keep aloof from worldly actions.
21. To prefer nothing to the love of Christ.
22. Not to follow the promptings of anger.
23. Not to seek an occasion of revenge.
24. Not to foster deceit in one's heart.
25. Not to make a false peace.
26. Not to forsake charity.
27. Not to swear, lest perhaps one perjure oneself.

28. To utter the truth with heart and lips.
29. Not to render evil for evil.
30. To do no wrong to anyone, but to bear patiently any wrong done to oneself.
31. To love one's enemies.
32. Not to speak ill of those who speak ill of us, but rather to speak well of them.
33. To suffer persecution for justice' sake.
34. Not to be proud.
35. Not to be given to wine.
36. Not to be a glutton.
37. Not to be given to sleep.
38. Not to be slothful.
39. Not to be a murmurer.
40. Not to be a detractor.
41. To put one's trust in God.
42. To attribute any good one sees in oneself to God and not to oneself.
43. But always to acknowledge that the evil is one's own, and to attribute it to oneself.
44. To fear the days of judgement.
45. To be in fear of hell.

46. To desire everlasting life with all spiritual longing.
47. To keep death daily before one's eyes.
48. To keep guard at all times over the actions of one's life.
49. To know for certain that God sees one in every place.
50. To dash upon Christ as upon a rock one's evil thoughts the instant they come to one's heart, and to manifest them to one's spiritual father.
51. To keep one's mouth from speech that is wicked or full of deceit.
52. Not to love idle chatter.
53. Not to speak words that are vain or such as provoke laughter.
54. Not to love much or noisy laughter.
55. To listen willingly to holy reading.
56. To apply oneself frequently to prayer.
57. Daily with tears and sighs to confess one's sins to God in prayer, and to amend these evils for the future.

58. Not to fulfill the desires of the flesh.
59. To hate one's own will.
60. To obey in all things the commands of the Abbot, even though he himself (which God forbid) should act otherwise, being mindful of that precept of the Lord: "Do what they say; but not what they do".
61. Not to wish to be called holy before one is so, but first to be holy that one may be truly so called.
62. To fulfill the commandments of God daily by one's deeds.
63. To love chastity.
64. To hate nobody.
65. To have no jealousy or envy.
66. Not to love strife.
67. To fly from vanity and pride.
68. To reverence one's seniors.
69. To love one's juniors.
70. To pray for one's enemies in the love of Christ.
71. To make peace with those with whom one is

at variance before the setting of the sun.

72. And never to despair of God's mercy.

Behold, these are the tools of the spiritual craft, which, if they be constantly employed by day and by night, and delivered up on the day of judgement, will gain for us from the Lord that reward which He Himself has promised: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the human heart to conceive what things God has prepared for those who love Him."

A Script for Confession

adapted by Priest Andrew Smith from the Brief Confession, which is from the Full Confession of St Demetrius of Rostov

*Venerate the Gospel and the Cross, then
turn to the priest and receive a blessing.*

I confess to the Lord my God, and before you, Father, all of my sins. I have sinned in many ways and at many times – including through the things I do, or say, or think.

I have sinned through my lack of thanks to God for how He has blessed me and how He has provided for me, even though I am a sinner.

Say your own sins here.

• Speaking without needing to.	• Yelling at people
• Judging other people.	• Gossiping about people.
• Being stubborn.	• Telling lies.
• Being full of pride, as if all things did not come from God.	• Doing what I want, instead of considering others.
• Not caring about the problems that other people struggle with.	• Telling people off when it's not my place.
• Being jealous of other people.	• Tempting other people to sin.
• Being angry at other people.	• Not being humble.
• Putting other people down behind their back.	• Desiring an object or a position.
• Not paying attention.	• Being vain.
• Not being concerned about my salvation, and not working towards it.	• Eating more food than I needed to. Drinking more than I needed.
• Being careless.	• Being picky about the food I eat.
• Thinking or doing things that aren't relevant to being followers of Christ.	• Not spending time thinking about important or eternal things.
• Being easily irritated.	• Being lazy.

• Being sad because of a loss of hope.	• Thinking about things that I know I shouldn't.
• Disobeying people I should obey (like parents, teachers, bosses, clergy, or good laws).	• Looking at things that I know I shouldn't.
• Being bitter about something.	• Wanting to have more things.
• Doing bad things to someone because they did bad things to me.	• Skipping church (or wishing I could skip church) because I couldn't be bothered.
• Complaining about things.	• Not focusing on prayer while in church services.
• Trying to justify myself when I have made mistakes.	• Not focusing on prayer in my own prayer time.
• Contradicting other people unnecessarily.	• <i>(And anything else you can think of.)</i>

**I have sinned in my actions, my words and my thoughts.
I have sinned through each of my senses.**

I also repent for any sin that I forgot, and any other sin I have done.

For all these things, I ask forgiveness. I declare my desire to turn away from these sins and to do good instead, for the sake of Jesus Christ.

I ask for forgiveness, venerable father, and to be cleansed of these sins, so that they will not be held against me. I also ask for a blessing to partake of Holy Communion, which I know is necessary for eternal life.

Here, the priest may offer guidance.

*When the priest says to, bow your head over the Gospel.
The priest will place his stole on your head, and then read prayers to reconcile you and to absolve you of your sins.*

*When he has read the two prayers,
venerate the Gospel & the cross, and
receive a blessing from the priest.*

Akathist Hymn of Repentance in Christ



Akathist Hymn of Repentance in Christ

Priest: Blessed is our God, always, now and ever and unto ages of ages.

Reader: Amen. Glory to Thee O God. Glory to Thee.

O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere and fills all things. Treasury of blessings and giver of life, come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every impurity. And, save our souls, O Good One.

Holy God, Holy Mighty , Holy Immortal, have mercy on us **(3)**.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

O Most Holy Trinity, have mercy on us. Lord, cleanse us from our sins. Master, pardon our transgressions. Holy One visit and heal our infirmities for Thy name's sake.

Lord, have mercy **(3)**.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Our Father, Who art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And, lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

Priest: For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory of

the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages.

Reader: Amen.

KONTAKION I

Choir/Faithful: Christ our Savior, we bring supplication and **praise** to You / as we heed the call to **repentance** of sins. / Grant us the wisdom to listen to Your teachings according to the **Scriptures**, / especially from that moment forward **when** You said, / “Repent, for the Kingdom of **Heaven** is at hand.” / Guide us to understand all things pertaining to **repentance**. / In recognition of Your divine message and Your entire **ministry** on earth, / we **implore** You: // Christ our **Savior**, **save** us.

IKOS I

Priest: The Forerunner and Baptist John preached in the wilderness of Judea. Many people from the region came to hear him say, “Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.” You also came from Galilee to be baptized, Lord Jesus, even though You had no need of repentance. The Heavenly Father then said of You, “This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased.” Both the newly baptized and the yet unbaptized therefore sang praises to You:

Choir/Faithful: Save us, Only-Begotten Son of God Who was sent into the world to **redeem** mankind.

Save us, Son of the Virgin Who freely offers forgiveness of **sins** to all.

Save us, Jesus Christ Who was baptized in the Jordan River by Saint John the **Baptist**.

Save us, Savior Who never sinned but fulfilled all **righteousness**.
Save us, for we have heard the holy preaching and we are born of
water and of the **Spirit**.

Save us, for we desire salvation and a **virtuous** life.

Save us, for the heavens rejoice when a **sinner** repents.

Save us, for the Kingdom of **Heaven** is near.

Save us, for we repent daily and prepare a way for You, Lord
Jesus.

Save us, for we continually make our path straight for You,
Immortal One.

Save us and make us worthy of the Holy Spirit **dwelling** in us.

Save us and make us heirs of the Heavenly **Kingdom**.

Christ our **Savior**, **save** us.

KONTAKION II

Priest: You called forth the fisherman, Peter, to follow You and become a fisher of men. Peter immediately left his nets and became Your devoted disciple. However, on that difficult day when you were betrayed and arrested, Peter's faith was shaken and he quickly denied You three times. Afterwards, Peter repented and fixed his heart on God, crying: Alleluia.

Choir/Faithful: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

IKOS II

Priest: Lord Jesus, You know the heart of every sinner and You invite penitents to an eternal life of peace, joy, and love. Peter recognized the inadequacy of his own feelings of loyalty, and learned that all strength is bestowed through the grace of God. Thereafter understanding that God can perform wondrous works through the weaknesses of the repentant, the holy Apostle sang praises such as these:

Choir/Faithful: Save us, for we believe that You are the Christ
Who has come into the world to save **sinners**.
Save us, for we shall not be afraid to confess You before
un**believers**.
Save us, for the wages of **sin** is death.
Save us, for in the Name of Jesus Christ is forgiveness of sins and
life ever**lasting**.
Save us, for we confess our trespasses and we forgive those who
trespass **against** us.
Save us, for only You can create in us a **pure** heart.
Save us, for we have sinned against God and against the **human**
race.
Save us, for we reject our evil ways which separated us from God
and caused strife with one **another**.
Save us, by being born again, we become the **children** of God.
Save us, by Your death on the Cross, You release us from the
bondage of passions and the **dominion** of death.
Save us, together with Saint Peter we beseech divine mercy upon
our **weaknesses**.
Save us, together with all the saints we despise sin and desire the
virtues.
Christ our **Savior**, **save** us.

KONTAKION III

Priest: When the Galileans were slaughtered by Pilate, during a religious ceremony, eighteen bystanders were accidentally killed when a tower fell on them. Using this tragedy to call people to repentance, Jesus, You said, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” Then all the people present said: Alleluia.

Choir/Faithful: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

IKOS III

Priest: Everyone is called to repentance without delay, for death can come unexpectedly to the virtuous and the sinful alike. Without a change of heart today, we will not be prepared to face the Judgment Day. Come then, let us repent unceasingly until we depart from this life, rightfully chanting praises to Christ our God:

Choir/Faithful: Save us, for all have sinned in thought, **word**, and deed.

Save us, for we are saturated with worldly **pleasures**.

Save us, for we succumb to conformity with **society**.

Save us, for the world welcomes our **downfall**.

Save us, for we are faithless in prayer and **worship**.

Save us, for we look down at the **troubled** sea.

Save us, for we repent and then turn back to our **old** ways.

Save us, for we ascend the ladder and then fall **into** the abyss.

Save us, for we covet **glory** for ourselves.

Save us, for we water the weeds of pride and **vanity**.

Save us, for we serve Satan in many **subtle** ways.

Save us, for we are not vigilant **day** and night.

Christ our **Savior**, **save** us.

KONTAKION IV

Priest: Mary Magdalene came to the tomb in the early morning hours, seeking the Sun that was to rise over the world. She wept as she looked down at the tomb, for she had also been at the Cross, and she loved You dearly. In Your great mercy, Lord Jesus, You appeared to her and spoke her name, “Mary!” Then with great joy she ran to the disciples and announced the astonishing news, shouting: Alleluia.

Choir/Faithful: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

IKOS IV

Priest: Speak our names also, Christ God, and call us out of the darkness of sin and into the radiant light of repentance. Lift us from the dread of death to the vista of Christian renewal, since we have renounced all worldly ways and wish to be filled with faith, hope, and charity. Thereby released from the tomb of our own making, we may cry out in gratitude:

Choir/Faithful: Save us, that we may walk forward in the True Faith.

Save us, that we may render all **glory** to God.

Save us, that we may live in obedience to His **divine** will.

Save us, that we may fulfill the teachings of the **Scriptures**.

Save us, that we may joyfully **mourn** for our sins.

Save us, that we may be comforted by the Holy **Spirit**.

Save us, that we may behold the beauty of the Theotokos.

Save us, that she may find in us a heart that **loves** her Son.

Save us, that we may learn the right path from Mary **Magdalene**.

Save us, that she may pray for us in times of tribulation.

Save us, that we may be a blessing to **others**.

Save us, that they may see the image of **God** in us.

Christ our **Savior**, **save** us.

KONTAKION V

Priest: The righteous Job seemed to suffer unfairly, having lived according to the ways of God all his life. Yet, Job never complained but only sought a deeper understanding of God. Job realized that mere human explanations for his condition were inadequate, and he replied to the Almighty and Sovereign God, “Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

Receiving a renewal of humility and trust, he then said: Alleluia.

Choir/Faithful: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

IKOS V

Priest: Only through repentance can we begin to understand our troubles on earth and the nature of God in Heaven. Even then, we can never fully know the mind of God, and He is not obliged to defend His actions to His creatures. Let us therefore bow down in humility, and trust in His divine wisdom with praises such as these:

Choir/Faithful: Save us from the **devil**.

Save us from death.

Save us from worldly **explanations**.

Save us from insufficient **philosophies**.

Save us from false **authority**.

Save us from false **humility**.

Save us from sinful **habits**.

Save us from impure **passions**.

Save us from our **transgressions**.

Save us from our **disobedience**.

Save us from self-**indulgence**.

Save us from self-**justification**.

Christ our **Savior**, **save** us.

KONTAKION VI

Priest: We see that Jesus Christ revealed Himself to Saul when, on a journey to Damascus, a light shone around him from Heaven. Saul heard a voice say, “I am Jesus Whom you are persecuting.” In that moment, with trembling, Saul asked, “What do You want me to do?” He who persecuted Christians then converted to

Christianity, repenting always and pleasing You in all things, Lord Jesus, and saying to all the nations: Alleluia.

Choir/Faithful: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

IKOS VI

Priest: Christ our Savior, the message of repentance was heard and then preached by the Apostle Paul who accepted You as the Savior of the whole world. He taught many people that You are the Way, the Truth, and the Life, so that all may sing supplications and praises in this manner:

Choir/Faithful: Save us, Holy Trinity, for we are baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy **Spirit**.
Save us, Almighty God, for You are all-knowing and all-**powerful**.
Save us, Jesus Christ, for You are all-merciful and all-**innocent**.
Save us, Holy Spirit, for You **dwel** in us.
Save us, Theotokos, for you are the Mother of the Incarnate God and you are our **Mediatress**.
Save us, Saint Paul, for you became all **things** to all men.
Save us, Lord Jesus, for we detest evil and **turn** to do good.
Save us, for we wish to do only what is **pleasing** to You.
Save us, for we make no **excuses** for our sins.
Save us, for we desire a renewed mind and a **pure** heart.
Save us, for we are followers of the **True** Way.
Save us, for we submit to Your **teachings**.
Christ our **Savior**, **save** us.

KONTAKION VII

Priest: Let us reconcile with God and with one another, confessing our sins and asking forgiveness. Let us not hesitate but respond immediately to Christ God Who said, “For I did not come

to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” If we repent, then the depth of our sinfulness will only indicate the greater depth of Christ’s love for mankind. Let us love the One Who first loved us and say to one another: Alleluia.

Choir/Faithful: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

IKOS VII

Priest: Who is the first among sinners? It is I, for I can repent only of my own sins. I cannot judge my brother or condemn my sister, but I can only turn from my own sins and bring forth good fruit as evidence of my repentance. Therefore, let us have sympathy for one another and sing praises in unity:

Choir/Faithful: Save us and call forth all the nations to repentance.

Save us and call forth all the kings and queens and **presidents**.

Save us and call the fishermen and the **shepherds**.

Save us and call the tax-collectors and the **prostitutes**.

Save us and call the theologians and the **teachers**.

Save us and call the **servants** and the slaves.

Save us and call the righteous with the **sinners**.

Save us and call the **poor** with the rich.

Save us and call the monks and nuns into the **chapel**.

Save us and call the hermits **into** the caves.

Save us and call the priests to the **altar**.

Save us and call the congregation to Holy **Communion**.

Christ our **Savior**, **save** us.

KONTAKION VIII

Priest: The good thief immediately repented when he beheld the goodness of Christ on the Cross. His name was Dismas and he

said, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom.” You assured him, Jesus, that today he would be with You in Paradise, and he cried out: Alleluia.

Choir/Faithful: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

IKOS VIII

Priest: Grant that we may also be with You, Lord Jesus, today and forever, on earth and in Heaven, for You have always been there for us even though we failed to discern Your goodness and Your innocent suffering on our behalf. Accept our repentance as You accepted Dismas who turned his eyes toward You in complete trust. We are all criminals deserving punishment, but in faith we offer these praises::

Choir/Faithful: Save us, for You are the **Crucified Christ**.

Save us, for You are the joy of **Great Lent**.

Save us, for we wish to die in a **repentant** state.

Save us, for we hope to be worthy of **everlasting** life.

Save us, for we pray for undeserved **kindness**.

Save us, for we yearn to know the **True God**.

Save us, for You are our Advocate with the **Father**.

Save us, for You desire that **none** should be lost.

Save us, for the way of the world leads to **destruction**.

Save us, for the way of the Cross pours out **forgiveness**.

Save us, for this world will **pass** away.

Save us, for the Kingdom is **eternal**.

Christ our **Savior**, **save** us.

KONTAKION IX

Priest: Poor Adam and Eve, for they sinned and did not repent. They did not take responsibility for their disobedience — but

Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. To this day, we blame others when we act upon our secret desires and transgress against God. However, it is not too late for us to turn to Christ Who, through obedience to the Father, overcame the serpent and restored Adam that we may all say: Alleluia.

Choir/Faithful: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

IKOS IX

Priest: In his refusal to repent of a promise gone wrong, Herod Antipas executed Saint John the Baptist whom he had already imprisoned. He who preached repentance was beheaded by him who preferred to please sinners and to abuse his position for malicious conduct. Christ our Savior, grant us the sense to turn away from the example of Herod and return to the preaching of the martyred John, repenting and chanting praises:

Choir/Faithful: Save us, for we are easily deceived and befuddled.

Save us, for we fear the **opinion** of the world.

Save us, for we want things that are not **good** for us.

Save us, for we are attracted to demonic **influences**.

Save us, for we think we can hide our **sins** from God.

Save us, for we do not want our evil **deeds** exposed.

Save us, for we are envious of **those** who do good.

Save us, for we resent those who resist the **devil**.

Save us, for we are comfortable with the **hideous**.

Save us, for we are no longer **shocked** by sin.

Save us, for we will disobey unless You **obstruct** our way.

Save us, for we will perish unless You **restore** us to life.

Christ our **Savior**, **save** us.

KONTAKION X

Priest: Lord Jesus, this is what You taught the people. “And this is the will of Him Who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” We do see You, Jesus, Son of God, and we repent before You, and when we repent we see You more clearly. In this way, we deepen our faith daily and say: Alleluia.

Choir/Faithful: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

IKOS X

Priest: We look only to You, Christ God, for it is the will of the Father that we know the Scriptures. We thereby behold Your wondrous works and perfect teachings, and we believe in You. The way of sin often seems right, but the consequence is always destruction. Only Your Way transforms us into children of light, walking on the road of righteousness and singing praises such as these:

Choir/Faithful: Save us and make us **alive** in God.
Save us and make us **in**struments of His love.
Save us and set us free from **wrong**doing.
Save us and grant us the gift of **et**ernal life.
Save us and raise us **up** from the dead.
Save us and put to death our **evil** deeds.
Save us and find us worthy of Your **com**passion.
Save us and have mercy upon whomever You will.
Save us and help our **un**belief.
Save us and **in**crease our faith.
Save us and make us **glad** in truth.
Save us and make us **wise** in thought.
Christ our **Savior**, **save** us.

KONTAKION XI

Priest: The Prodigal Son committed many outward sins, but repented inwardly with his whole heart and soul when he said, “Father, I have sinned against Heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.” The father, overjoyed at the son’s return and moved by his humility and remorse, quickly forgave him and said: Alleluia.

Choir/Faithful: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

IKOS XI

Priest: If we likewise repent, brothers and sisters, our Father in Heaven will greet us and reinstate us to the stature of obedient children and the heirs of His riches. He sent His Only-Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from sin, for He so loved us and wanted us to have eternal life. For this reason, we sing praises with thanksgiving:

Choir/Faithful: Save us and forgive us for every transgression.
Save us and receive us as prodigal sons and **daughters**.
Save us, for we have squandered our **potential**.
Save us, for we have disrespected Your tender **mercy**.
Save us, for we have wasted the wealth of **Christianity**.
Save us, for we have disregarded the **Crucifixion**.
Save us and protect us on the path to the **virtues**.
Save us and guard us from the lure of **wrongdoing**.
Save us and nourish us with the teachings of the **Scriptures**.
Save us and strengthen us with the **writings** of the saints.
Save us, for we are **restored** to new life.
Save us, for it is **right** to be glad.
Christ our **Savior**, **save** us.

KONTAKION XII

Priest: We see that Jesus Christ, John the Baptist, Peter and Paul went forth and preached repentance. They understood that preaching, and therefore the Gospel, is for the purpose of fulfillment of salvation and not for empty talk and vain arguments. Christ is risen and is living, and He is the Lord to Whom we joyfully say: Alleluia.

IKOS XII

Priest: We have heard the preaching, Lord Jesus, and we believe and repent. We shall bring forth fruit worthy of repentance, each in our own way and according to the will of God. We die to our sins in order to live for Your love, unceasingly offering praises:

Choir/Faithful: Save us, Divine **preacher**.

Save us, patient **teacher**.

Save us, sub**missive** Son.

Save us, merciful **Master**.

Save us, sublime **wisdom**.

Save us, perfect **goodness**.

Save us, for**giver** of debts.

Save us, absolver of in**iquities**.

Save us, reconciler of **sinner**s.

Save us, Redeemer of **penitents**.

Save us, receiver of **prodigals**.

Save us, rewarder of **believers**.

Christ our **Savior**, **save** us.

KONTAKION XIII

Let the unbaptized come forward and be baptized. Let the baptized move upward in continual repentance for transgressions committed after Baptism. Let us all renew our trust and acquire

humility. May we deepen our faith day by day in prayer. May we not take lightly our deliverance, but accept responsibility for our deeds and thank Christ our Savior for His immeasurable compassion, saying: Alleluia.

Choir/Faithful: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

This kontakion is recited thrice; whereupon Ikos I and Kontakion I are repeated.

IKOS I

Priest: The Forerunner and Baptist John preached in the wilderness of Judea. Many people from the region came to hear him say, “Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.” You also came from Galilee to be baptized, Lord Jesus, even though You had no need of repentance. The Heavenly Father then said of You, “This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased.” Both the newly baptized and the yet unbaptized therefore sang praises to You:

Choir/Faithful: Save us, Only-Begotten Son of God Who was sent into the world to **redeem** mankind.

Save us, Son of the Virgin Who freely offers forgiveness of **sins** to all.

Save us, Jesus Christ Who was baptized in the Jordan River by Saint John the **Baptist**.

Save us, Savior Who never sinned but fulfilled all **righteousness**.
Save us, for we have heard the holy preaching and we are born of water and of the **Spirit**.

Save us, for we desire salvation and a **virtuous** life.

Save us, for the heavens rejoice when a **sinner** repents.

Save us, for the Kingdom of **Heaven** is near.

Save us, for we repent daily and prepare a way for You, Lord **Jesus**.

Save us, for we continually make our path straight for You, **Immortal One**.

Save us and make us worthy of the Holy Spirit **dwelling** in us.

Save us and make us heirs of the Heavenly **Kingdom**.

Christ our **Savior**, **save** us.

KONTAKION I

Choir/Faithful: Christ our Savior, we bring supplication and **praise** to You / as we heed the call to **repentance** of sins. / Grant us the wisdom to listen to Your teachings according to the **Scriptures**, / especially from that moment forward **when** You said, / “Repent, for the Kingdom of **Heaven** is at hand.” / Guide us to understand all things pertaining to **repentance**. / In recognition of Your divine message and Your entire **ministry** on earth, / we **implore** You: // Christ our **Savior**, **save** us.

Priest: Again and again on bended knees let us pray to Christ our Savior

Choir/Faithful: Christ our **Savior**, **save** us.

Prayer to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

Priest: Hear our prayer, Jesus Christ, for our sins have wrought ruin upon us and we seek restoration and reconciliation. We can hardly speak, for our transgressions are countless and Your innocence is brighter than a white cloud. The origins of all our wrongdoings are pride, vanity, greed, jealousy, ambition, bitterness and every other passion of our fallen condition. Forgive us, Christ our Savior. Restore us in every way that we may thank

You for everything and for everyone. Thank You for letting us see our own sins, that we may repent of them now and be found worthy though unworthy of eternal life. All that we ask is to do what is pleasing to God from this day forward.

Choir/Faithful: Amen.

The Litany

Priest: Have mercy on us, O God, according to Thy great goodness, we pray Thee, hearken and have mercy.

Choir/Faithful: Lord have mercy (3)

Priest: Again we pray for His Beatitude, Metropolitan _____, His (*Grace /Eminence*), (*Arch*) Bishop _____, for priests, deacons, and all other clergy; and for all our brethren in Christ.

Choir/Faithful: Lord have mercy (3)

Priest: Again we pray for the president of our country, for all civil authorities and for our armed forces everywhere.

Choir/Faithful: Lord have mercy (3)

Priest: Again we pray for mercy, life peace, health, salvation and visitation for the servants of God _____, and for the pardon and remission of their sins.

Choir/Faithful: Lord have mercy (3)

Priest: Furthermore, we pray for the people here present, awaiting

from Thee great and bountiful mercies for all the brethren and for all Christians.

Choir/Faithful: Lord have mercy (3)

Priest: For Thou art a merciful God, and loves mankind, and unto Thee we ascribe glory: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages.

Choir/Faithful: Amen.

Priest: Wisdom! Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Choir/Faithful: More honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim! Without defilement you gave birth to God the Word; true Theotokos we magnify you.

Priest: Glory to Thee, O Christ our God and our hope, glory to Thee !

Choir/Faithful: Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.
Lord have mercy (3). Father bless.

Priest: [pronounces the dismissal and faithful venerate the Cross]

Lord Jesus Christ Son of God Have Mercy on us!

Glory Be To God For All Things!

FORGIVE US, MERCIFUL LORD!

A General Confession for Great Lent

Led by Fr. Artemy Vladimirov

In Russia, where churches are filled to the streets during Christmas and Holy Week, general confessions are held in churches where it would be physically impossible to hear thousands of individual confessions. Although personal confessions are required throughout the year, regular parishioners who frequently partake of the sacraments, have been to confession in the previous weeks, and have not committed any serious sins, are allowed to attend a general confession a few days before these two great feasts in preparation for Holy Communion. The following text from one of these general confessions, led by Fr. Artemy Vladimirov of Moscow, is offered to our readers as a reflection for their own Lenten practice.



There remains, brothers and sisters, only one day of the Great Fast. Many of us remember reading a prayer on the eve of the fast in which we asked our Omnipotent Lord to give us strength and wisdom to walk this road to the end, that we might see Christ's Resurrection. The Christian who has tried to obey mother Church's regulations (though he may not be irreproachable) and repents of having stepped aside voluntarily or involuntarily from the path outlined by the Church for the Great Fast, today bears in his heart good fruit, a mind of profit: the grace of the Holy Spirit, Who supports those who toil, strengthens those who are exhausted, and brings the work undertaken by faithful Christians to a victorious finish.

Standing in church before the icons, we sense the all-seeing, strict yet merciful eyes of Our Saviour upon us. With God's help, let us now weigh our hearts and lives on the scales of Divine truth and love. It is not difficult. If we stand before God in spirit, He, Who is Light, will illumine all the dark corners of our heart, all impurity and sores, all the festering, deadly, and repulsive sins that cry out to God for our condemnation if we do not repent.

Looking, then, into the face of our Creator, let us ask ourselves, brothers and sisters, if we, as God's thinking creatures, have always preferred our Lord Jesus Christ; always considered Him to be the true God incarnate; named Him the Only-Begotten Son of the Father in Heaven, Co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit; have always felt and seen in Him the source and cause of our existence; given glory to Him as our Creator, Maker, Redeemer and Saviour, as our Teacher whose word is Spirit, Who Himself is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Looking back, most of us will confess with sorrow that much of our life has been darkened by ignorance. The image of Jesus Christ was not drawn in our heart and we shielded ourselves from the Eternal Light, perhaps even fighting against God or blaspheming Him – although we felt that He indeed is Light and Goodness. More often we simply turned our backs on Him. Many of us lived from our infancy outside the Church, not knowing its saving warmth, its omnipotent, all-victorious love, like plants devoid of sunlight.

Remembering those years, months, hours, and minutes of graceless existence, we rejoice that God has called us to His miraculous Light and mourn that, as involuntary apostates, we willingly immersed ourselves in ignorance and faithlessness.

+ Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

We recall our blasphemous words (we may not have seen them as such then, thinking they were only jokes) when tempted by our classmates, teachers, or sometimes, our parents. We cast this verbal mire at our Lord Jesus Christ, despising the Truth and Love we saw in His face.

"Forgive us, Lord!" we cry, remembering that every sin, every blasphemy against the Son of Man will be forgiven those who did so out of ignorance and sinful blindness.

We confess the temptations we have caused, whether we are aware of them or not: of drawing our children, our relatives, our friends, into the darkness of disbelief in the Living God, and by our disorderly lives denying the vows of baptism pronounced by our godparents in early childhood. Let us repent before God for tempting others in deed and word, consciously or in ignorance.

+ Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

Contemplating the Lord Jesus Christ, we understand that spiritually serving Him is the true meaning of human life on earth. Standing before God we are to glorify, thank, and praise Him, to live in the angelic doxology: *Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabbaoth, heaven and earth are filled with Thy glory.*

The sin of ingratitude to our Lord is connected to the sin of ignorance. Holy Scripture tells us that we were made to glorify God, to proclaim His perfection to the world, but we have been far from this. For many of us, our gloomy lives have been overshadowed by a spiritual night. Our souls were not animated by the breath of thanksgiving, and the world lost its color and warmth as we lost our spiritual connection with the Redeemer.

So, those who have spent days, months, and years of their lives without true thanksgiving, but who pronounced the words "Thank God" as a mean-

ingless phrase, should confess. Ingratitude blinds the human soul. Think of a baby completely dependent on his mother, who is fed with her milk, warmed with her love, but who feels no gratitude to her. Such are we, whom the Lord showers with hidden and open mer-



cies, whom He saves from danger. Let us remember the times when death walked beside us, but God mercifully held it back, even while we lacked the reason to see in this the hand of Christ.

Forgive us, Merciful Lord, for the times about which we knew and were not grateful, and the many times unknown to us, when God sent His angels to save us from certain danger and even death!

We confess to having breathed the God-given air, received our daily food, shelter, clothing, and all earthly goods without gratitude. The Lord brought us together in this life with those who, from all eternity, were destined to be our helpers, relatives and friends. We accepted all this as our due, daring to be dissatisfied and grumbling, if not against God, against His Providence. Thinking that our life is poor and dull, perhaps we have even been led to blaspheme.

Lord, forgive any of us, who in a moment of madness, damned the day of his birth, reproached his mother for having brought him into this world, or was stung by devilish suicidal thoughts, thus participating in Judas' betrayal.

+ Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

It is easy to predict that the heart of an ungrateful Christian will be open to the repulsive, murderous spirit of gloom and sadness. Ignoring the voice of the Resurrected Lord through His apostle, calling us to "*rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks,*" we became as the living dead, filling our hearts with sadness, disappointment, and perhaps even despair — thereby losing God's grace, which does not abide in weak, uncourageous hearts.

Let us repent if this spirit has entered our very bones, and drive it out with prayer and repentance, asking the Saviour to enliven us with deep joy, cheerfulness, courage, satisfaction, and especially, gratitude. Even when we are



sad and burdened, we are to be thankful. The Lord Himself knows all that we have to bear, and, having been tempted for a little while, we will be rescued. Let us never drop the cross of patience, giving way to faint-heartedness and despondency.

+ Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

Turning our gaze towards Jesus Christ, we see and feel that God's creation is ruled by love. This is divine and eternal love, pure and holy love, love that has called the world from nonexistence, that maintains the orderly union of creation and enlivens every human being, giving him strength to live on earth. Christ is abun-

dance, filling everything with Himself. He is the source of Divine love, and through belief in God, prayer, repentance, and especially through the Church's sacraments, we become the transmitters of this Divine, eternal and ever-growing love.

What can you expect from a person who is so gloomy that he cannot give

thanks? If we have immersed ourselves in this unhappy state, it is no wonder that we only feel coldness, irritation, anger, vengefulness, and other hellish emotions in our soul.

+ Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

Have any of us become joyless beings who whine and burden the people around us with complaints, reproaches, and reprimands?

+ Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

Undoubtedly, the "one who hates his brother is a murderer." He lies in darkness. If you do not forgive — with all your heart — those who sin against you, neither will your Father in heaven forgive you. Therefore, we must thoroughly recall those moments and hours when we were filled with dark coldness, hate, and anger. Then, indeed, Satan himself ruled in our heart. How many caustic, spiteful, shameful, impure, murderous, blasphemous words were uttered at that hour? What injuries, unhealed sometimes for months and years, did we inflict upon those who love us, who were connected to us by bonds of kinship and affection?

+ Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

What devastation the passion of anger leaves in the heart after it has scorched the soul with its lightning wrath! Such a person is taken by the evil one into Tartarus. The Christian has to toil, repent, pray, to resist with his spirit, mind, and will, that his heart may be completely healed by the action of the Holy Spirit.

Blessed, they say, and three times blessed, is he who has not allowed this murderous passion of anger into his soul. Let us look, brothers and sisters, into the hidden depths of our conscience. Is the poisonous snake of evil-speaking hate not hidden there? Perhaps this passion has escaped our attention. Maybe we still have someone whom we dare to call an enemy, someone whom, even now, we do not wish to live on this earth, whom we damn, wishing their eternal death, not even attempting to forgive them with all our heart. Here is a poison much more dangerous than narcotics. And if we do not spit this poison out of our soul today, the Saviour will reject us at the Last Judgement saying: *"Depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil, hater of all good, and his angels."*

Let us ask God, the chief surgeon, to heal any of us who are infected by the passion of anger, who have been tortured, perhaps for many years, by dislike of our close ones. Let us look mentally at each of our relatives and acquaintances to see if there isn't any such poison in our hearts.

Lord, remove these thoughts and feelings, purify and fill the heart with mildness, mercy, meekness, love, patience, compassion. Do not allow this evil passion to continue to drain our life's blood!

+ We repent, O loving Lord! Have mercy on us and forgive us.

Our omnipotent Saviour is purer than heaven itself with all its angels. Each of us knows well that love is a pure and holy feeling and that the Lord has founded a grace-filled refuge to shelter us. Such a refuge for the Christian is either blessed celibacy with external or internal dedication of oneself to God, or marriage, accomplished with vows of mutual fidelity before a priest in the sacrament of the Church.

Unfortunately, demons have toiled over us, disfiguring the God-given beauty of our nature by filling our inexperienced and ignorant souls with the passions of impure lust. Even our youngest years were not spared: we did not know when to hide our eyes, how to fight against the thoughts that penetrated for the first time and lodged themselves in the depth of our heart. Even in extreme youth some of us partook of the filth of impure dreams, desires, images, fantasies — the rotten roots that produce the tree of fleshly impurity, the tree that twists and distorts natural virtue and the thirst for heavenly love put into us by God.

Forgive, Merciful Lord, the sins of indiscretion committed in childhood, for peeping and impure touches — perhaps without complete awareness, but already springing from an impure heart; for games we learned watching the unchaste life of adults.

+ Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

Let us confess to God (and for those who have already confessed, regret) that many of us have sinned against the virtue of innocence, of virginity, having parted with these outside a marriage blessed by God; thus becoming not only criminals to ourselves, but tempters to those who stumbled over our lustful impurity.

+ Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

We also beg and pray to wipe out of the book of life all of those sins that must be disclosed to a priest in sufficient detail in private confession, that we may completely drive out of our souls the spirit of sensuality. Especially burdened is the conscience of a Christian who has already promised his faith and fidelity to a beloved spouse, but sins against this first love, falling into adultery. *Be not deceived*, says the Apostle Paul. If they do not repent ...*neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers ... inherit the Kingdom of God. Marriage was created pure by God and the marriage bed is undefiled.* Let us repent, knowing ourselves to be guilty of these sins, if not in deed then in thought, when we reached for the forbidden fruit.



+ Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

Let us repent also of the general impurity of our life. There are many people who appear to guard themselves well, living in matrimonial virtue, but you had better not look into their hearts. They themselves avoid doing so because they resemble a stinking pit burning with fire and sulfur from indecent reading and impure images. Through such captivity some have been driven by the devil to unpronounceable sins of self-pollution.

+ Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

Repentance is very important for those parents who have not been sufficiently attentive towards their offspring; shutting their eyes to their children's cassettes, disks, and books with unclean contents. Those parents should also repent who did not see anything wrong in allowing their children to watch adult films. The parent who has allowed the mass media in his home to drift with the times has a heavy burden on his soul for connivance, for not opposing evil with good, for not tearing his children from the sources of temptation and impurity. Who, if not the parents, will answer to God for the children's sins?

Forgive us, Merciful Lord! Give us wisdom and strength to put things right, to do everything needful to educate the coming generation.

Our times are also characterized by the sin of not relying on God's providence and mercy. How many of us bear in our hearts exhausting fears, anxiety, vague apprehensions, and panic? The merciful Lord commands us to



keep peace in our hearts. Holy Scripture warns us of the coming time of trial, *"Have my peace within you ... be not terrified ... but pray always that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."*

How many of us Orthodox Christians fail to understand the Lord's command to be the light of the world? In our days, a Christian is like a star shining in the depth of night. However, some of us, while appearing pious, are downcast, gloomy creatures, ill-disposed toward people, never acknowledging the virtues of affability, sympathy,

striving towards virtue; all the while hiding under a pious appearance, the repulsive passions of selfishness, self-love, and hard-heartedness.

How can we repent if these things are our skin, our bone, our flesh? We were born in this sin and will die in it if God does not enlighten us with His grace. Let us pray that the Lord takes from us the blinders of self-love and teaches us to serve others, to forget ourselves and our own benefit (at least a little and occasionally) for the good of our neighbor. Lord, help us to apply these words to ourselves and not to the person standing next to us.

+ Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

Our Saviour is divine abundance, filling everything with Himself, alpha and omega, the beginning and the end. Everything is in Him, and everything moves towards Him. Our Saviour is the One who quenches our thirst for knowledge, for true fulfillment. He is the life of the human soul,

but often the soul is not persuaded of this and strong temptation brings about the corruption of both soul and body. Such burdens, such consuming sins, include:

... a weakness for wine.

Lord, help us, purify us and give us victory!

...a weakness for food and drink, inducing us to break the holy fasts, paralyzing us and obscuring our view of eternity.

Lord, teach us to find a right measure here. Give us noble, prayerful hearts, grateful for all that Thou hast given.

...smoking.

Lord, purify this filth from our soul and body.

... and weakness for "light," but actually very dark, reading and television.

* Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

Television is the bait for a God-loving soul of our days. Only he who knows what he watches and for what reason does not suffer from this spiritual disease, and can learn useful things for his life on earth. Unfortunately, such people are few; most of us are caught by the forces of worldly evil and through them we live lives of corruption, not as contemplatives but as blockheaded parishioners of the flickering screen.

Forgive us, Merciful Lord, and help us to rid ourselves of this wicked disease that deprives us of spiritual advancement.

Here, we will probably also want to repent of deeply rooted pride, ambition, vanity, thinking much of ourselves, for our lack of meekness and wise humility.

Forgive us, Lord, for arrogance, conceit and the ignorance that unites them.

Forgive us, Lord, for the inability to ask forgiveness, for our stung self-esteem, for keeping in our memory injuries and insults inflicted by our neighbors.

* Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

Forgive us, Lord, for judging and blaming others, for being Pharisees and hypocrites, for pretending to have virtues that we do not really possess. Forgive us, Merciful Lord! Purify and enlighten our souls with mildness, mercy, generosity, kind-heartedness. Teach us to judge no one but ourselves.

As we turn to the Lord, perhaps we see some forgotten sins of stealing (even in far-away childhood), dishonesty, lying, greed or love of money.

Let us consider another wound — spiritual adultery. A human being is a creature whose immortal soul seeks God, and he will inevitably worship something higher than himself. Unfortunately, not all of us quickly found the healthy, prophetic, saving, and holy Orthodox faith. Many of us fell into nets of spiritual delusion.

Forgive us, Merciful Lord, for having been strangers to our mother Church, for the doubts that grew like weeds in our soul as we listened to heretical and pagan teachers and guides.

+ Purify us, Merciful Lord!

Forgive us for satiating our unredeemed curiosity with so-called “mystical” reading, thereby killing our soul. Indulging in “eastern” and “new age” teachings, we appropriated the ugliest and most blasphemous ideas of the impersonal nature of the Divine, of reincarnation, of the unique human personality turning to nothing or losing itself in an ocean of spiritual energy after death.

How hard it is for some people, poisoned by the satanic malice of heresy, to rid themselves of these ideas. Let us repent that God may purify our minds and hearts and never allow these poisonous seeds to be resown.

+ Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

Forgive us for false thinking, for not being apostles of Orthodoxy, for being sick with ignorance, mixing faith and superstition. Forgive, O Lord, those of us, who, seeking bodily or spiritual health, addressed occultists, shamen, or “new age” healers. Sometimes, we have even been deceived by the Christian appearance of their homes or offices, when, in fact, they inflicted demonic possession upon us, either in our presence or in our absence.

+ Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

Make right our faith, purify and seal us with the divine, saving, God-disclosed dogma of truth imprinted in the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments, and guarded, understood, and taught aright only in the holy, catholic, apostolic, Orthodox Church.

+ Forgive us and have mercy on us, Lord!

We repent of all the forgotten, unknown, and unidentified sins, not yet named in our confession.

+ Forgive us, Merciful Lord!

We repent of making our sins appear mild, of having no strength to call things by their proper names. It is hard to judge oneself but it saves, for when we approach the Cross and the Gospel knowing that this could be our last confession, and that ahead of us lies the Great Judgement, then what relief, what purity and joy God gives to even a hardened sinner who confesses without justifying himself.

We repent before Thee, Lord! We have sinned in word, deed and thought, by all of our senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and all other sins, spiritual and bodily. We have sinned by long-forgotten sins, sinned by many blasphemous, impious, impure thoughts, which are impossible to speak aloud.

Brothers and sisters, let us collect all of our sins into one imagined vessel of repentance, and taking this vessel into the hands of our soul, let us mentally plunge it into the sea of God's mercy, that no one may doubt God's grace and love, but will know that God Himself forgives, purifies, and saves us, if only we promise:

"I repent before Thee, O Lord, of all these spoken and unspoken sins. Forgive and absolve me, even as the priest will testify to today's confession at the Last Judgement, and I, sinful (*name*) promise to make every possible effort to guard myself from the sins I have confessed." Amen. +

Preparation for Confession

St. Maximus Orthodox Church, Denton, Texas

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Preparation for the Holy Mystery of Confession

A Canon of Repentance

Composed by St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

O Lord my God, save Thou the soul of Thy servant that hath been washed in Thy Blood, and open unto *him* the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven.

No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit. (John 1:18; I John 4:12-13)

The heart is deep beyond all things, and it is man, and who can know him? (Jeremiah 17:9)

From the morning watch until night, from the morning watch let Israel hope in the Lord. For with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption; and He shall redeem Israel out of all his iniquities. (Psalm 129:5-6)

O God, be merciful to me, a sinner. (*3 times with prostrations*)

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen.

O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, who art everywhere present and fillest all things, Treasury of good things and Giver of life: Come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every stain, and save our souls, O Good One!

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us!

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us!

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us!

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

All-holy Trinity, have mercy on us. Lord, cleanse us from our sins. Master, pardon our transgressions. Holy One, look upon and heal our infirmities for Thy name's sake.

Lord, have mercy; Lord, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. Amen.

Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us, for laying aside all excuse, we sinners offer unto Thee, as to our Master, this supplication: have mercy on us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

O Lord, have mercy on us, for in Thee have we put our hope. Do not be angry with us, nor remember our iniquities, but look down upon us even now, since Thou art compassionate, and deliver us from our enemies; for Thou art our God and we are Thy people; we are all the work of Thy hands, and we call on Thy Name.

Now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

O Blessed Theotokos, open the doors of compassion to us whose hope is in thee, that we may not perish, but be delivered from adversity through thee, who art the salvation of the Christian people.

Lord, have mercy. (12)

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Come, let us worship God our King

Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ, our King and our God.

Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ Himself, our King and our God.

Psalm 50

Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy, and according to the multitude of thy compassions, blot out my transgressions. Wash me yet more from my transgressions, and from my sin purify thou me. Against thee alone have I sinned, and have done evil before thee; that thou mightest be justified in thy words, and conquer when thou art judged. Behold, in transgressions was I conceived, and in sin did my mother bear me. Behold, thou hast loved truth, the hidden and Preparation for Confession

secret things of thy wisdom hast thou revealed unto me. Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop and I shall be cleansed; Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Thou shalt make me hear joy and gladness; the bones that have been humbled shall rejoice. Turn away thy face from my sins, and blot out my transgressions. A clean heart create in me, O God, and a right spirit renew in my inmost parts. Cast me not away from thy face, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Give me again the joy of thy salvation, and establish me with a princely spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and the impious shall return unto thee. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; my tongue shall rejoice in thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips and my mouth shall declare thy praise. For if thou hadst desired sacrifice, I would have given it; with burnt-offerings thou wilt not be pleased. A sacrifice to God is a broken spirit; a broken and humbled heart God will not despise. Do good, O Lord, in thy goodwill unto Zion; and let the walls of Jerusalem be built. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifice of righteousness, oblations, and burnt-offerings; then shall they lay bullocks upon thine altar.

The Canon of Repentance, tone 6

Ode 1

Irmos: When Israel passed on foot over the sea as if it were dry land, and beheld their pursuer Pharaoh drowning in the sea, they cried aloud unto God: Let us sing a song of victory!

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

When I think of the many evil things I have done,
wretch that I am, I tremble at the fearful day of judgment.
But trusting in Thy lovingkindness, like David I cry to
Thee: Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great
mercy.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Open to me the gates of repentance, O Giver of life,
for my spirit riseth earth to pray towards Thy holy
temple, bearing the temple of my body all-defiled. But in
Thy compassion, purify me by the lovingkindness of Thy
mercy.

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy
Spirit.*

O Lord Almighty, I know how much tears can
accomplish: they led Hezekiah forth from the gates of
death, delivered the sinful woman from long-standing
iniquities, and justified the publican beyond the pharisee;
and, numbered with them, I pray: have mercy on me.

Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Lead me on the paths of salvation, O Theotokos, for I
have profaned my soul with shameful sins and have
wasted my life in laziness. But by thine intercessions,
deliver me from all impurity.

Ode 3

Irmos: None is holy as Thou, O Lord my God! Thou
hast raised the strength of Thy faithful, O Good One, and
made us stand firmly on the rock of Thy confession.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Like the prodigal son do I also approach Thee, O
Compassionate One, having squandered all my life; in
departing I have wasted the riches that Thou didst bestow
upon me, O Father. Accept me that repent, O God, and
have mercy on me.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Stretching forth Thy fatherly arms, receive me now, O
Lord, as Thou didst receive the prodigal, O
Compassionate One, that I may thankfully glorify Thee.

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy
Spirit.*

Glory to Thee who hast not thus far destroyed me!
Glory to Thee who art patient with mine iniquities!
Accept me who turn away from Thee, O compassionate
Father, Only-begotten Son, Holy Spirit, my Creator and
Lord, and have mercy on me.

Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Having shown forth all thy beneficence upon me, O
God, through the divine entreaties of Thy Mother
disregard the multitude of my transgressions, in that
Thou art my Benefactor.

Ode 4

Irmos: “Christ is my strength, my God and my Lord,”
— the sacred Church reverently singeth with a mighty
voice, rejoicing in the Lord.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Woe is me! What shall become of me? What shall I do? Committing sin—fool that I am!—I have not feared the Master; wherefore, even before the judgment, I am condemned. O good and just Judge, turning unto me, save me who have angered Thee more than all men.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned before Thee. Cleanse Thou me! For there is none among men that sin whom I have not surpassed in iniquity.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

O Lover of man, who desirest that all be saved, raise me up and receive me who repent, for Thou art good.

Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Lord, O Lord, whom all fear, trembling before the countenance of Thy might, before Thee do I fall prostrate, O Immortal One; Thee do I implore, O Holy One: Save Thou my soul, through the intercessions of Thy saints and of the Theotokos.

Ode 5

Irmos: I pray Thee, O Good One: Enlighten with Thy Divine Light the souls which look to Thee from early dawn, that they may know Thee, O Word of God, as the True God who calleth them out from the darkness of sin.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Cast into the deep abyss of pleasures, I call upon the depths of Thy compassion, O Helmsman: Save me!

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Wellspring of compassion, do Thou now grant me compunction and sighing, that I may lament the boundless sea of my evil deeds.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

The span of my life is short and full of pain and evil; yet accept me in repentance, and call me to my senses. That I may be neither the spoils nor the sustenance of him that is alien, O Savior, do Thou Thyself take pity on me.

Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Thou art our weapon and a wall of defense, O Virgin Theotokos; thou art a help unto them that call upon thee. And now in prayer do I move thee, that I may be delivered from mine enemies.

Ode 6

Irmos: Beholding the sea of life surging with the storm of temptations, and taking refuge in Thy calm haven, I cry unto Thee: Raise up my life from corruption, O greatly merciful One.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Taking pity, save me, O Son of God. Have mercy, Thou who didst heal the possessed by a word. Speak unto me with the voice of compassion, as Thou didst to the thief: “Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise, when I come in My Kingdom.”

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Ask not of me worthy fruits of repentance, for my strength hath failed within me. Grant me a contrite heart and poverty of spirit, that I may offer these to Thee as an acceptable sacrifice, O Thou who alone art our Savior.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

O Lover of man, I have not the boldness to lift mine eyes and gaze unto the measureless heights, having sinned against heaven; nor can I call myself Thy prodigal son; yet take pity on me freely, O Thou who hast boundless mercy.

Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

O Virgin Mary, at the hour of judgment, do thou entreat the Judge whom thou didst bear, that He have compassion, O Pure One, and save the condemned, O thou who alone art intercessor for man.

Ode 7

Irmos: The angel made the furnace a source of dew for the pious youths, and the will of God, which burned the Chaldeans, made the persecutor call out: Blessed art Thou, O God of our fathers!

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

I dare not lift mine eyes to heaven, wretch that I am, because of mine evil deeds; but like the publican, sighing I cry out to Thee: Cleanse me, a sinner, and deliver me from the hypocrisy of the pharisee, O God of our Fathers, who alone art compassionate.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Thieves have fallen upon my soul and left it wounded by my transgressions, barely alive; but heal me, O God of our Fathers.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

Perceiving the barrenness of my much-suffering soul, yet do Thou forbear, O Christ, and cut me not down like the cursed fig tree, O God of our Fathers.

Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

O all-pure Theotokos, grant me aid by thine intercessions, repelling the attacks of grievous misfortunes.

Ode 8

Irmos: Thou didst cause dew to pour from the flames over the pious youths, and didst burn the sacrifice of a righteous man with water – for Thou doest all things, O Christ, by Thy will alone. We exalt Thee throughout all ages.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Having rolled away the stone of obstinance from my heart, O Lord, raise up my soul which has been slain by the passions, O Good One, and vouchsafe unto me in compunction to bring Thee palms, as to the Vanquisher of hell, O Master, that I may obtain eternal life, O Thou who alone lovest man, hymning Thy dominion and compassion unto all the ages.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

I have enriched myself with unseemly thoughts, wretch that I am. I have defiled my soul with wicked pleasures and the darkness of despair. Shed upon me the radiance of repentance, O my God, that I may thankfully glorify Thee unto all the ages.

Let us bless the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Lord.

Wasting away with the disease of sin, I am laid low upon the bed of despair. Wherefore, do Thou visit me in Thy love for man, O Physician of the sick, and leave me not to sleep grievously unto death, O All-compassionate One, that I may cry out to Thee, O Bestower of mercy: O Lord, glory to Thee!

Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

O most holy Mother of God, Rampart of Christians, deliver thy servant who am wont to cry earnestly unto thee; oppose thou my vile and prideful thoughts, that I may cry to thee: Rejoice, O Ever-virgin!

Ode 9

Irmos: It is not possible for men to see God upon whom the ranks of angels dare not gaze, but through thee, O All-pure One, was the Word Incarnate revealed unto men, whom magnifying together with the Heavenly Hosts, we call thee blessed.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

To Thee do I flee, O Jesus, Son of God, who didst assume the guise of a servant for my sake, wretch that I am; have mercy on me through the intercession of Thy Bodiless Hosts.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Before Thee do I fall prostrate, O my Deliverer; through the entreaties of Thy Forerunner and of all Thy Prophets and Forebears, have mercy on me.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

To Thee do I sigh, O Lover of man, Thou only Refuge and Hope of sinners, Savior of all; through the prayers of Thy Disciples who preached Thee, the Savior, to us, have mercy on me.

Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

In Thy goodness, being well-pleased to be born of the most-pure Virgin and to abide upon earth with men, O Word of God, do Thou have mercy upon me through her intercession and that of all the Saints who have ever been pleasing unto Thee.

We then proceed to examine our lives thoroughly in the light of the commandments of the Law and of Christ.

Having examined our lives, we then complete the prayers of preparation for the Holy Mystery of Confession.

Meet it is in truth to bless thee, O Theotokos, who art ever-blessed and all blameless and the Mother of our God. More honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious without compare than the Seraphim who without corruption gavest birth to God the Word, verily Theotokos, we magnify thee.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us!

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us!

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us!

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

All-holy Trinity, have mercy on us. Lord, cleanse us from our sins. Master, pardon our transgressions. Holy One, look upon and heal our infirmities for Thy name's sake.

Lord, have mercy; Lord, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. Amen.

Lord, have mercy; Lord, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

More honorable than the Cherubim, and more glorious without compare than the Seraphim, who without corruption gavest birth to God the Word, verily, Theotokos, we magnify thee.

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us.



Self-Examination according to the Ten Commandments

First Commandment: *Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.*

Have I believed in God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
One God in Three Persons?
Have I acknowledged God as the Lord, the source of all good
things, the Savior of my soul and body?
Have I loved God with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength?
Have I constantly had the thought of God in my mind and the fear
of God in my heart?
Have I failed to trust in God and His mercy?
Has my faith in God been shaken by skepticism or doubt?
Have I complained against God in time of adversity?
Have I been thankful for God's blessings? Have I given thanks to
God at all times for all things, or have I complained or cursed
when things did not go "my way"?
Have I questioned or doubted the holy tenets of the Orthodox
Faith?
Have I asked God to strengthen my faith?
Have I been prideful? trusted in my own strength and ability rather
than in God? Have I asked God's blessing on all that I do?
Have I done the right thing out of love of God or out of vainglory,
so that others notice how good I am?
Have I despaired of God's mercy or help?
Have I prayed to God every day, morning and evening?
Have I prayed with zeal?
Have I always attended Divine Services whenever possible? Have
I missed any of them without good reason?
Have I tried to serve God, putting Him and His will first in my life
and keeping His commandments?
Have I preferred religious books over others? Have I, in fact, read
them?

Have I read atheistic or heretical books out of sinful curiosity?
Have I attended the meetings of heretics and schismatics?
Have I willingly brought my tithes and offerings into the Lord's
House as part of my worship?
Have I honored God with the first part of my income rather than
the leftovers?
Have I given alms to those in need when I had the opportunity?
Have I neglected my duties to God through fear of ridicule or
persecution?
Have I denied that I am a Christian?
Have I denied any teaching of the Orthodox Church?
Have I given way to superstition?
Have I consulted astrologers, fortune-tellers, spiritualists, or read
horoscopes?
Have I put myself before God?
Have I forgotten or neglected the most important thing in life, that
is, preparing for eternity? How will I answer God if I have
given myself up to vanity, sloth, pleasure, and carelessness?

The Second Commandment: *Thou shalt not make thee any
graven image...thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor
serve them...*

Have I made an idol of any person or thing?
Have I given to any one or to any thing the worship that is due to
God alone?
Have I put God first? Or have I given first place to: accumulation
of money, acquisition of property, amusement or entertainment
or sports, food and drink, clothes, self-adornment, attention to
myself, eliciting praise from others, drinking alcohol, taking
drugs, spending time in distractions, obsession with myself, or
with other persons or things?

Have I been distracted from God by a passion for watching television or movies, surfing the internet, attending the theater, or playing games of one sort or another?

Have I been so anxious about myself, my family, or my friends that I have neglected God, failed to serve Him, and not carried out what is required of me by the Church?

Have I given too much attention to my home and its furnishings, its decoration and repair?

Have I paid too much attention to a car, truck, van, boat, or other vehicle of travel?

Have I been irreverent during Divine Services, let my attention wander, been insincere, been late, or gone in and out of services unnecessarily?

Have I neglected to receive Holy Communion regularly?

Have I received the Divine Gifts without due preparation?

Have I made an idol of myself?

Have I made an idol of some passion? love of money? gluttony? sexual desire? anger?

Have I allowed a passion to take possession of my heart?

Have I read the Holy Scriptures regularly?

Have I read books that would be spiritually nourishing?

Have I set before myself the holy life of Jesus my Savior and tried to imitate Him?

Have I called on Him to help me?

Have I read the lives of the Saints and tried to imitate their virtues, especially those of my Patron Saint? Have I asked for their prayers and their strength?

The Third Commandment: *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord Thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.*

Have I profaned the name of God in any way?

Have I been thoughtless or irreverent with the name of God?

Preparation for Confession

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Have I used the name of God in a curse?

Have I treated something holy as a joke, or joked about holy things?

Have I grumbled toward God or even renounced Him at any time?

Have I shown due respect to the clergy and the faithful, or have I hindered them in their work through gossip, slander, backbiting, or in any other way?

Have I shown respect for all other people, who are made in God's image?

Have I prayed absent-mindedly or inattentively?

Have I cursed anyone or anything?

Have I sworn a false oath?

Have I broken an oath or a promise?

Have I entered into any sinful or unlawful contract or made a sinful or unlawful promise?

Have I given in to despondency or despair?

The Fourth Commandment: *Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God. In it thou shalt not do any work...*

Have I failed to attend Divine Services on the Lord's Day or on a Great Feast without just cause?

Have I kept others from attending Divine Services?

Have I done unnecessary work on Sundays or on Great Feast days?

Have I violated the sanctity of the Lord's Day or Great Feasts by unwholesome or frivolous activities?

Have I distracted others from keeping these days in a godly way?

Did I pray at home if I was unable to attend Divine Services on the Lord's Day or a Great Feast?

Did I make every effort to worship "in spirit and in truth" while I was at a Divine Service?

Did I allow myself to be distracted by worldly concerns at a Divine Service? to judge others? to think unwholesome or frivolous things?

Did I make the effort to come to Divine Services on time?

Have I diligently kept the fasts of the Church?

Have I caused anyone else to violate the fasts or tempted anyone to do so?

Have I fasted properly in my heart, realizing a hunger for God and life in Him, rather than legalistically, just to fulfill the letter?

The Fifth Commandment: *Honor thy father and thy mother, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.*

Have I been disrespectful to my parents or inattentive to their advice and concern for me? Have I been lacking in love for them? Have I withheld love from them?

Have I disobeyed my parents?

Have I neglected my parents or failed to help them?

Have I cared for my parents in their illnesses or old age?

Have I deceived my parents or caused them pain by my words or actions?

Have I prayed for my parents and other relatives?

Have I prayed for the repose of my parents and other relatives who are departed?

Have I done my duty toward my family?

Husbands: Have I laid down my life for my wife, and loved her as Christ loves His Church?

Wives: Have I been obedient and respectful to my husband?

Have I encouraged peace and mutual respect among the members of my family?

Have I been responsible toward my *wife/husband*, children, and others who depend on me for help, counsel, guidance, or support?

Have I been lacking in love for my *wife/husband* or harmed *her/him* in any way?

Have I set a good example for my children?

Have I tried to rear them in godliness and teach them the Faith?

Have I disciplined them with patience? or in anger?

Have I been overindulgent with my children?

Have I been stingy with any members of my family or with others?

Have I neglected my godparents or failed to honor them?

Have I neglected my godchildren or failed to instruct, guide, or encourage them in the Orthodox Faith?

Have I worked for my employer honestly and diligently?

Have I treated fairly and respectfully all who worked with me or who are under my supervision?

Have I respected and prayed for the civil authorities?

Have I honored those who are older than I?

Have I shown respect for all others?

Have I mocked or made fun of others?

Have I respected the clergy of the Church and prayed for them?

Have I criticized or mocked them? Have I been embittered against them, especially when they chastised or corrected me?

Have I honored God as my Father, the Church as my Mother, and other human beings as my fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters?

The Sixth Commandment: *Thou shalt not kill (murder).*

Have I killed another person, or have I contributed to the death of another person?

Have I had an abortion or given support and encouragement to someone else to have one?

Have I wanted another person to die?

Have I wanted any type of harm to come to another person or group of people?

Have I tried to kill myself or thought seriously about doing it?

Have I caused injury to another person?

Have I caused injury to myself through smoking, overindulgence, drinking too much alcohol, taking drugs or too much medicine, or through evil and intemperate living?

Have I given way to anger?

Have I cursed anyone or hurt anyone with undue harsh words?

Have I been cruel to anyone?

Have I ignored someone who needed help or failed to defend someone who was being treated unjustly or cruelly?

Have I failed to respond to those who are in need: to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the imprisoned, the homeless, the ill, the troubled, the afflicted, the depressed, or those with other needs that I could help?

Have I harmed someone spiritually by leading him into temptation to commit spiritual death through heresy, schism, or by some other sin?

Have I shown malice or hatred toward another person?

Do I bear any malice or resentment or hatred in my heart toward anyone else?

Have I prayed for my enemies and done good to them?

Have I failed to forgive anyone or harbored evil thoughts against anyone?

Have I mistreated animals or destroyed or harmed any living creature unnecessarily?

The Seventh Commandment: *Thou shalt not commit adultery.*

Have I committed the sins of adultery or fornication or had any sort of sexual contact with another person outside of marriage (the union of one man with one woman)?

Have I committed the sin of masturbation?

Have I done anything impure alone or with any other person(s)?

Have I engaged in bestiality, transvestitism, sodomy, homosexual relations, or any other abnormal sexual practice?

Have I degraded myself or another person in any way?

Have I forgotten or ignored human dignity?

Have I been immodest in dress or behavior or speech?

Have I lived in an improper way with anyone else?

Have I read or looked at immoral, suggestive, or pornographic books, magazines, pictures, movies tapes, dances, plays, or performances?

Have I entertained impure thoughts or fantasies? Have I been unfaithful to my spouse through impure thoughts or fantasies?

Have I looked at any person or thing in an impure way?

Have I spoken or listened to impure or suggestive language, dirty jokes, or lewd songs (much of popular music)?

Have I eaten or drunk too much? Have I tempted others to do so?

Have I associated with bad companions?

Have I been to unsavory places?

Have I been lazy, idle, or wasteful of time?

Have I tempted others or led them to commit sinful acts or to entertain sinful thoughts?

Have I tempted others through my own immodesty or through suggestive language or actions?

Have I been unfaithful to any trust given me?

Have I betrayed the confidence of anyone else?

Have I judged another person?

The Eighth Commandment: *Thou shalt not steal.*

Have I stolen anything or wished to do so?
Have I stolen by fraud, deception, or conspiracy?
Have I kept anything that did not belong to me?
Have I stolen by not rendering a service for which I was compensated?
Have I tried honestly to find the owner of lost articles I found, when it was reasonable to do so?
Have I cheated or defrauded anyone?
Have I accepted or purchased stolen goods?
Have I disposed improperly of another person's goods?
Have I paid my debts in a timely way?
Have I lived within my means? Have I run up credit card debt beyond what I can quickly pay off?
Have I lived extravagantly or wastefully?
Have I been selfish with what is entrusted to me?
Have I been miserly in soul?
Have I shared with others?
Have I been stingy?
Have I given to those in need?
Have I given God the first part of my income?
Have I robbed God by not bringing my tithes and offerings into His house?
Have I been honest and upright in my dealings with others?

The Ninth Commandment: *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.*

Have I slandered anyone?
Have I lied?
Have I added to or taken away from the truth?
Have I made careless statements or spoken evil of anyone?
Have I betrayed the confidence of another person?

Preparation for Confession

Have I criticized others?
Have I rejoiced in the failings or downfall of others?
Have I covered my brother's shame as Shem and Japheth covered their father Noah's nakedness?
Have I spread gossip or scandal?
Have I hurt the reputation of anyone else?
Have I concealed the truth or assisted in carrying out a lie?
Have I confessed to sins I have not committed?
Have I confessed all the sins I have committed?
Have I failed to come forward to defend another person when I knew he was being slandered or spoken against unjustly?
Have I tried to see the good in others?
Have I concentrated on the shortcomings of others?
Have I engaged in idle chatter?
Have I spoken unnecessarily?
Have I laughed or acted frivolously?
Have I made a real effort to be truthful at all times?

The Tenth Commandment: *Thou shalt not covet...*

Have I envied others, either their lives or their goods?
Have I desired anything that was another's?
Have I damaged or destroyed the possessions or property of others?
Have I desired things God has not given me?
Have I been discontent in my life?
Have I held back anything due to another because I wanted it myself or for any other reason?
Have I hoped for the downfall of another so that I might gain by it?
Have I failed to be gracious and generous to anyone?
Have I wanted from God what I refused to give to a fellow man: forgiveness? goods? grace? physical or spiritual blessings?
Have I been greedy?

Have I been jealous of another person's goods, money, appearance, success, love, popularity, being loved by another or others?
Have I concentrated my time, efforts, and thoughts on the things of this world rather than on the things of the spirit?

Preparation for Confession

An Examination of Conscience

I, a sinful soul, confess to our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, all of my evil acts which I have done, said or thought from baptism even unto this present day.

First Torment: Idle speech

- * Have you spoken without thinking? or spoken too much? or spoken anything that is impure? or shameless? or without need or order? or unreasonable? or unclean?
- * Have you thought or said angry words or foul words?
- * Have you participated with or sung worldly shameless songs in word or thought?
- * Have you laughed unnecessarily or excessively? or laughed about things that you shouldn't have laughed about or found funny?
- * Have you acted too silly?

Second Torment: Lying

- * Have you kept the vows of your baptism?
- * Have you failed to keep oaths or promises to God?
- * Have pronounced the name of God without reverence?
- * Have you falsely confessed your sins? or was insincere about, belittled, justified, or kept silent about your sins during confession?
- * Have you lied?
- * Have you been sly or secretly mischievous? or have you been deceptive or hypocritical?

Preparation for Confession

- * Have you honestly obeyed traffic laws?
- * Have been argumentative or stubborn?

Third Torment: Spoke evil of others

- * Have you spread rumors or gossiped in thought or in word?
- * Have you slandered anyone wanting to or intending to injure the reputation of another?
- * Have you given bad ideas or words to people?
- * Have you laughed at other's deficiencies or misfortunes?
- * Have you maligned treated anyone with malice or shown hatred toward or abused or wronged or injured anyone?
- * Have you condemned anyone? or declared others unfit?
- * Have you made fun of people in thought, word, or action? or mocked in a harmful way?
- * Have you reproached anyone or reflected on anyone abusively?
- * Have you taunted, teased, or tempted anyone?
- * Have you insulted anyone?

Fourth Torment: Gluttony

- * Have you eaten before putting on the sign of the cross?
- * Have you eaten when you were not hungry?
- * Have you eaten too much at one time or became too full during the fasts?
- * Have you eaten without having thankfulness to God?
- * Have you eaten like a slob or out of control stuffing food in your mouth?
- * Have you consumed too many alcoholic beverages to the point of being drunk?
- * Have you respected the feasts and fasts as much as I should?
- * Have you broken the fasts?
- * Have you not looked forward to the fasts taking in mind the true meaning and purpose of them?
- * Have you eaten too many sweet foods for the enjoyment of them or had a love of sweets?

- * Have you had gluttonous fantasies?

Fifth Torment: Sloth

- * Have you taken efforts to remember and extensively learn the Commandments of God and the precepts of the Holy Fathers by reading spiritual things?
- * Have you kept your physical and spiritual passions in check all the time? Or had a general carelessness about doing things having to do with the salvation of your soul?
- * Have you devoted yourself to the comforts of life?
- * Have you lacked endurance towards my illnesses and sorrows by not struggling against your passions as much as you should?
- * Have you been idle? or not worked as hard as you could have? or fallen asleep at work? or not wanted to get out of bed?
- * Have you complained about having to work or attend long services or say long prayers?
- * Have you cared to praise and thank God as much as I could or should have throughout the day?
- * Have you failed to keep in continual prayer trying always to keep your mind on serving God?
- * Have you dwelled upon your previous sins?
- * Have you fallen into despondency? Or given up hope or not having faith in God that He can and will change you?
- * Have you forgotten to pray at certain times during the day?
- * Have you rushed through or not said your morning and evening prayers whole-heartedly?
- * Have you attended the services completely?
- * Have you been fully prepared to go to Church to worship? or have you gone to Church only half-heartedly, lazily, and carelessly?
- * Have you conversed during the services about things not having to do with the service?
- * Have you paid complete attention during the services?
- * Have you let your mind wander or daydream or think other ungodly thoughts during prayer or services?

Preparation for Confession

- * Have you left the Church before the dismissal and blessing?

- * Have you forced yourself to do good at all times?
- * Have you had a weak will?

Sixth Torment: Stealing

- * Have you stolen anything or thought seriously about stealing something?

Seventh Torment: Avarice and love of money

- * Have you loved riches?
- * Have you been content with what God gave you?
- * Have you wished in your mind that you had more money than you do already?
- * Have you acquired unnecessary things? or had and immoderate attachment to material things?
- * Have you been too concerned or caught up with material things?
- * Have you been too concerned with things having to do with the flesh?
- * Have you bought things in exchange for proper tithing?
- * Have you been greedy or selfish?
- * Have you worried about money or financial circumstances instead of putting your trust in God?
- * Have you had fantasies about material wealth or having riches?

Eighth Torment: Usury

- * Have you gained riches by exploiting people?
- * Have you accepted bribes?
- * Have you acquired something that belonged to another?

Ninth Torment: Injustice

- * Have you judged anyone?

- * Have you acquitted the guilty and condemned the innocent all for the sake of gain
- * Have you been unjust in anyway?
- * Have you accused an innocent person of committing an act that they did not do?

Tenth Torment: Envy

- * Have you envied anyone? or been jealous?

Eleventh Torment: Pride

- * Have you been prideful?
- * Have you thought myself better than anybody else?
- * Have you considered yourself worthy while considering others unworthy?
- * Have you had a high opinion of yourself in any way?
- * Have you talked down to anyone?
- * Have you compared or measured yourself up to anyone?
- * Have you looked out for other people's faults rather than your own?
- * Have you tried to conceal the shortcomings of others while trying to conceal your virtues?
- * Have you been critical of other people or criticized anyone?
- * Have you been arrogant, vain, or conceited?
- * Have you relied completely on yourself rather than God?
- * Have you bragged or boasted of things that you have accomplished? Have you loved praise and honors? Have you put on airs?
- * Have you been prideful of the good deeds that you have done?
- * Have you failed to give proper honor or obey your parents or superiors appointed by God? Have you been disobedient?
- * Have you thought yourself self-important?
- * Have you been self-willed instead of trying always to do the will of God?
- * Have you been self-righteous? Have you self-justified your sins?

- * Have you disregarded the counseling of your conscience?
- * Have you failed to confess any of your sins through negligence or false pride?
- * Have you been impatient or anxious about anything in which you shouldn't be that way about?
- * Have you been prejudice towards anyone for any reason?
- * Have you had prideful fantasies of power, fame, or glory?

Twelfth Torment: Anger and Ruthlessness

- * Have you felt anger?
- * Have you said anything unfeeling towards anyone? Have you harmed or hurt anyone's feelings in any way?
- * Have you carried on arguments with anyone about anything in your head?

Thirteenth Torment: Bearing grudges

- * Have you nurtured evil thoughts against anyone?
- * Have you returned evil for evil?
- * Have you remembered wrongs anyone did to you in the past?
- * Have you bore any grudges instead of understanding, loving, and forgiving?
- * Have you kept in mind when anyone made offences towards you?
- * Have you imagined ways you could have revenge on anyone?

Fourteenth Torment: Murder

- * Have you wounded anyone in some way?
- * Have you had any violent or destructive thoughts?
- * Have you had any harmful thoughts aimed towards anyone?
- * Have you wished evil upon anyone?
- * Have you been angry with people without a just cause?

Fifteenth Torment: Magic, sorcery, poisoning, and incantations

- * Have you thought about your past interest in magic and things relating to magic?
- * Have you imaged Holy things having some sort of magical properties?

Sixteenth Torment: Fornication

- * Have you had any sensual or lustful thoughts? carnal thoughts?
- * Have you daydreamed about amorous and lustful things and found them sweet?
- * Have you made impure glances?
- * Have you touched yourself in a lustful or passionate way that was pleasing or arousing?
- * Have you had blasphemously lustful thoughts about saints and holy people?
- * Have you been unchaste in thought, word, or deed?
- * Have you waken up from lustful bad dreams and found them pleasing to think about?
- * Have you had fantasies of lust or fornication?

Seventeenth Torment: Adultery

- * Have you had any adulterous thoughts with married people?

Eighteenth Torment: Sodomitic sins

- * Have you sinned against your nature?

Nineteenth Torment: Heresies

- * Have you participated in Holy Communion having as much humility or the fear of God as you should?
- * Have you loved and feared the Lord always?
- * Have you turned away from the Orthodox confession of faith by apostatizing and agreeing with false doctrines or beliefs?
- * Have you lacked faith?
- * Have you doubted or had misconceptions about the faith?

- * Have denied holy things or had a negative attitude towards them?
- * Have you been grateful for all of God's great and unceasing gifts, His mercy, His long-suffering, and His providence?
- * Have you fulfilled the Holy Commandments of God, the canons, and the rules of the Church?
- * Have you blasphemed or swore in thought or word?
- * Have you thought curse words when you pray?
- * Have you turned words of prayer into profane words or filthy concepts?
- * Have you feared man instead of God?
- * Have you been too attached to parents, relatives, and friends?
- * Have you answered the telephone during prayer?

Twentieth Torment: Lack of compassion and cruelty of the heart

- * Have you lacked mercy, forgiveness, compassion, and love for anyone?
- * Have you felt hatred toward anyone? or any other manifestation of hatred?
- * Have you been unfriendly to anyone? or been cruel?
- * Have you ridiculed anyone?
- * Have you rejoiced at the misfortunes of other's?
- * Have you had abusive or violent thoughts?
- * Have you been polite and friendly while driving on the roads and highways?

I have sinned in deed, word, and thought, voluntarily and involuntarily, knowingly and unknowingly, in knowledge and in ignorance, willingly and unwillingly, thoughtfully and thoughtlessly, by day and by night, and it is impossible to enumerate all of my sins because of their multitude. But I truly repent of these and all others not mentioned by me because of my forgetfulness and I ask that they be forgiven through the abundance of the mercy of God.

What Is Necessary for a Saving Confession?

by St. Innocent, Enlightener of the Aleuts

What is Confession? Confession is the oral avowal of one's sins which lie heavy upon the conscience. Repentance cleanses the soul and makes it ready to receive the Holy Spirit, but confession, so to speak, only empties the soul of sins.

Let us present a simple analogy and comparison to confession. For example, suppose you had only one vessel of some kind, which you through negligence or laziness let reach a stage where little by little it accumulated all sorts of dirt so that your vessel became not only unusable but even unbearable to look at without repugnance. But what if a king wanted to give you as a gift some sort of fragrant and precious balm, one drop of which could heal all infirmities and protect—what then? Would you refuse such a valuable gift only because you had no other clean vessel in which to put it? No! It would be very natural for you to accept such a gift and you would try to clean your vessel. How would you begin to clean your vessel? No doubt, before anything else, you would rid it of all uncleanness; you would begin by washing it with water and, perhaps would even burn it out so that it no longer retained any of its former odors. Isn't that so?

Now let the vessel represent the soul given to you by God, which you have brought to such a state that it has been filled with all kinds of transgression and iniquities; let the sweet-smelling balm, given by the king, signify the Holy Spirit, Who heals all infirmities and afflictions, Whom the King of heaven and earth, Jesus Christ, freely bestows upon us. To examine your vessel signifies feeling your guilt before God and recalling all sins which have stolen into your heart. To clean out the vessel typifies the confession of your sins before your spiritual father, and washing with water and burning with fire signifies a sincere and even tearful repentance and a voluntary resolve to endure all unpleasantness, needs, afflictions, misfortunes, and even calamities that befall us.

Now tell me: Is Confession profitable or needful? Certainly it is profitable and even essential; because, just as it is impossible to cleanse a vessel without ridding it of all uncleanness, so it is impossible to purge your soul of sins without confession. But tell me, is confession alone enough for the reception of the Holy Spirit? Certainly not, because in order to receive the sweet-smelling and precious balm into a defiled vessel it is not enough to just empty it, but it is necessary to wash it with water and refine it with fire. Just so, in order to receive the Holy Spirit, it is not enough just to confess or recite your sins before a spiritual father, but it is necessary together with this to purge your soul with repentance or contrition and grief of soul, and burn it out with voluntary endurance of afflictions. So then, this is what confession and repentance mean!

What does a true and correct confession consist of? When we wish to cleanse our conscience of sins in the Mystery of Repentance, 1) before everything else it is necessary to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and firmly hope that He is ready to forgive all sins, no matter of what magnitude, if only the sinner repents open-heartedly; it is necessary to believe and hope that the God of all wants and seeks our return. Of this He assures us through the prophet thus: As I live, saith the Lord, i.e., I assure and swear by My life. In desiring I do not desire, i.e., I do not at all desire the death of a sinner, but entirely desire his conversion.

2) It is necessary to have a broken heart. Who is God? and who are we? God is the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth; He is the awful and righteous Judge. And we? We are weak and insignificant mortals. All people, even the greatest people, are less than dust before God, and we can never imagine how disgusting to God is any sin and how any transgression offends Him. And we, insignificant and weak, we mortals endlessly benefited by our God, dare to offend Him—the All-Good One? Oh! This is so horrible! We are such debtors before God, such transgressors, that not only should we not dare to call ourselves His children, but are not even worthy of being His lowliest servants.

Therefore, picturing all this, you see what contriteness, what lamentation it is necessary to have then, when we want to purge ourselves of sins. And such a feeling must be had not only before confession and during confession, but also after confession. And even more important, do you want to offer a sacrifice to God such as will be acceptable to Him? Naturally we all gladly want this and as far as possible we offer it. But what can we offer Him really accept-able?—a broken heart. A sacrifice unto God is a broken spirit; a heart that is broken and humbled, here is an offering to God more priceless than all offerings and oblations!

3) It is necessary to forgive all our enemies and offenders all the harmful and offensive things they have done to us. Forgiveness—what does it mean to forgive? To forgive means never to avenge, neither secretly nor openly; never to recall wrongs but rather to forget them and, above all, to love your enemy as a friend, a brother, as a comrade; to protect his honor and to treat him right-mindedly in all things. This is what it means to forgive. And who agrees that this is difficult? So, it is a hard matter to forgive wrongs, but he who can forgive wrongs is for this reason great—truly great, both before God and before man,—Yes, it is a hard matter to forgive your enemies; but to do nothing, it is necessary to forgive, otherwise God Himself will not forgive. Jesus Christ said: If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your trespasses. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses. On the contrary to this, though you pray to God every hour, though you have such faith that you can move mountains, even though you give away all of your belongings to the needy, and give your body to be burned,—if you do not practice forgiveness and do not wish to forgive your enemy, then all is in vain, for in such circumstances neither prayer, nor faith, nor charity, will save you, in short, nothing will save you.

But if it is needful to forgive our enemies, so likewise it is indispensable to ask also forgiveness of those people whom we have offended. Thus, if you have offended anyone by word, ask forgiveness of him, come and bow down at his feet and say,

"Forgive me." Have you offended by deed? Endeavor to expiate your guilt and offenses and recompense his damage, then be certain that all of your sins, no matter how heavy they be, will be forgiven you.

4) It is necessary to reveal your sins properly and without any concealment. Some say, "For what reason should I reveal my sins to Him Who knows all of our secrets?" Certainly God knows all of our sins, but the Church, which has the power from God to forgive and absolve sins, cannot know them, and for this reason She cannot, without confession, pronounce Her absolution.

5) Finally, it is necessary to set forth a firm intention to live prudently in the future. If you want to be in the kingdom of heaven, if you want God to forgive your sins—then stop sinning! Only on this condition does the Church absolve the penitent of his sins. And he who does not think at all about correcting himself confesses in vain, labors in vain, for even if the priest says, "I forgive and absolve," the Holy Spirit does not forgive and absolve him!

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Making a Good Confession

St. Theophan the Recluse

Repentance is a simple matter—just sigh and a few words, “I have sinned, and shall not sin again.” But this sigh must have passed through the heavens in order to become an intercession at the throne of Truth, and these words must erase from the book of life all the marks representing our sins. Where can they obtain such power? From pitiless self-judgment and in fervent contrition. This is the path of our repentance: make your heart softer and more humble, and then, at Confession, do not be ashamed to reveal all that shames you in the eyes of the Lord and of the people.

In the matter of preparing for Communion, the greatest difficulty for us is to go to Confession and to reveal ourselves to our spiritual father. Actually, this should be a most gratifying experience. Is it not a comfort for him who is covered with wounds to be healed? For him who is covered with soil to be cleansed? Or for him who is chained to regain his freedom? This is precisely the spiritual power of absolution at Confession. We come with our injuries and leave healed; we come unclean and leave cleansed; we come in bonds and leave free. That is the promise of the Lord: first tell of your transgressions and then you will be forgiven.

Undoubtedly you will be forgiven, but first you must confess your transgressions without concealment. Know that only an open wound can be treated, only exposed dirt can be cleansed, only those bonds that are shown can be untied. Beware, lest you leave unhealed, uncleansed, and enslaved.

The action comes from the Lord. The spiritual father speaks and acts for Him. The Lord knows your sin, and even in your thoughts you cannot conceal it from Him, but the Lord wants to know whether you are prepared to confess your sins in His presence, if He Himself were standing before you, or whether you would try to conceal them like your forebears, Adam and Eve, in Paradise. That is why He appears to you in the person of your spiritual father to whom you confess and who in His name gives

you absolution, which by the very fact of having been uttered by weak mortals on earth, becomes impressed in heaven by the Lord’s power. Your spiritual father also represents all mankind. He who is ashamed to reveal himself should banish this shame with the thought that here, in front of his spiritual father, the shame that he feels is lesser than that to come. This shame can bring salvation instead of joylessness and hopelessness. There will come the day when all our bad deeds will be revealed to all mankind, and then the shame we will feel will be such that we should rather be buried under mountains than experience it. Therefore the Lord instituted this experiencing of shame before a single person, so you may be spared experiencing it before all mankind.

But there is one great evil in our hearts—at times we are quite ready to reveal all our sins but the main one, the one that shames us the most. Most often this is a carnal sin, but there are others that can be in this category. He who is burdened with such a weakness is ready to perform any good deed just to leave this sin hidden, but the Lord has a rule: give Me no alms if you are unchaste; don’t fast if you are suffering from greed; don’t offer prayers if you are filled with vanity. Open up your wound, so you may be healed and imbued with goodness. Be inspired to overcome within yourselves precisely that which resists the most.



A Catechism on Confession: How To Make a Good Confession

When preparing to go to confession, every Orthodox Christian should try to remember all the sins that he has committed, whether voluntary or involuntary, and should examine his life in detail. If there are sins that were committed before his last confession, but which he then forgot to confess, he should mention these also.

When you come to confession, you should confess your sins sincerely, remembering that you are not confessing them to the priest, but to God Himself, Who already knows, but wants you to admit your wrongs and your guilt. You should not feel embarrassed before your spiritual father, because, being a man like yourself, he knows human weaknesses and the inclination that all people have towards sin, and thus he cannot judge you harshly when you come to confession. But maybe you are embarrassed to confess your sins before your spiritual father because you are afraid of losing his good opinion? On the contrary, if you value his good opinion, you should understand that he will respect you all the more for the sincerity of your confession. Also, if you are ashamed and afraid to lay bare your sins before your spiritual father, how will you bear it when at the Dread Judgment your sins—if you have not been freed of them by true repentance—will be revealed before God Himself, His angels, and all mankind, both people you know and strangers? If you remember this, you will want to free yourself from your sins and from the punishment that they bring upon you, and will confess them in all sincerity before your spiritual father. You should hide nothing wrong that you have done, but at the same time you should not add anything extra, and not blame yourself for what you have not done by simply saying, “Everything I have done is sinful,” or some such catch-phrase. Nor should you admit every sin you are asked about whether you have done it or not, as some people mistakenly think they should. Your confession must be realistic and therefore true.

Another reason why you should not simply say, “I have sinned in everything, word, deed, and thought, and by omission,” without giving further details, is because your spiritual father needs to know exactly what you have done in order to give you good advice. Also such a short, undetailed confession means that you are avoiding what confession is intended to achieve, i. e. to bring you to admit what you have done and to admit that you were wrong in doing it. Your spiritual father already knows that you are a sinner, for no man is without sin; even the holy Apostle Paul described himself as the “chief of sinners.” Each sin must be mentioned in turn, just as you would enumerate all your symptoms to a doctor. You should not just think of a couple of main trends to “discuss,” and neglect to mention the innumerable other sins.

Do not mention the sins of others in your confession, unless this is necessary for your spiritual father to understand how and why you yourself have sinned. If you have a personal problem involving other people, which you would like to discuss with your spiritual father, or if you are in need of advice or some consolation for some unkindness that has been done to you, make an appointment to see your spiritual father at some other time. Also, do not use the fact that many people commit some sin that you have committed as an excuse for it. Still less say “but everyone does that.” For one thing, you have come to confess your own sins, not those of others. How can you be sure that without exception every human being commits any given sin? Or even though you might know of their sin, how can you be sure they have not repented of it in their heart? Pay no heed to the sins of others. Oftentimes we imagine the motives and intentions and sinful inclinations of others, for no man knows the heart of another.

Confess your sins fully but concisely; one does not have to make a story of them! That in itself can be an evidence of pride. Particularly regarding carnal sins, do not go into detailed descriptions of sin. If your spiritual father feels that you need to confess any particular sin in fuller detail, he will ask you about it, and then you should not hesitate to describe it fully and to answer all his questions.

Before going to confession make a thorough preparation, and examine your life so that you recognize your sins. If you wish you can write out a list, or keep a list day by day. In order to check your sins, it is wise to check them against some list. One can use the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, or the list of sins in the prayer of daily confession of sins read before going to sleep each day, or that in the prayer at the end of the Canon to the Guardian Angel in the Prayer Book. Such checking against a list is very beneficial, otherwise one tends to remember only the most serious sins, or the most noticeable or most extraordinarily, and to forget, perhaps deliberately, the underlying ones, the ones that have become habitual, and the things that we have forgotten even to remember as sins because they have become so much a part of our life. Sins of neglect, omission, and laziness often fall into this category, as do the ones that are seemingly respectable: pride, vanity, etc.

Do not try to make excuses for your sins, for the more that you justify yourself, the less forgiveness you will receive. It is important that you yourself should fully realize how wrong each sin you have committed is—and the more you understand the wrongfulness of any sin, the easier it will be for you to make an effort of will to avoid committing it in the future. However, you may mention if there is any special circumstance, such as some particular temptation or outside pressure, that it would be useful for your spiritual father to know, so that he can advise you how to deal with it.

It is important not to overlook any sin, but to mention all the sins that you have committed.

If you are asked whether you have committed a particular sin, it is not good enough to reply, “I can’t remember.” This is, of course, much less likely to happen if you go to confession regularly. It is good at the end of your confession to admit that there may be other sins which you have forgotten or have not realized that you have committed—such a sin might be by a careless word or action which has upset someone and perhaps caused them to sin.

Unless your spiritual father asks you about them, do not mention sins that you have not committed, nor good deeds that you have done. If you are asked whether you have committed some sin and have not, simply say “No.” Do not say, “I have committed no serious sins,” because this means that you do not realize how sinful what you have done is, and how sinful your insensitivity is.

Also do not be insensitive to the feelings and weaknesses of others, including your spiritual father. If you have not confessed for some time, or have some particular difficulty and are likely to need a long confession, try not to come on the eve of a great feast or when there will be many other people going to confession, but come on a day when there are likely to be few, or make a special arrangement with the priest. Also, unless it is otherwise completely impossible (because, for instance, you live far from the church), do not come for confession either immediately before the Divine Liturgy (when the priest will be preparing the gifts) or during the service, when you will cause the entire congregation to wait while your confession is heard.

If after your confession you are hoping to receive a blessing to partake of the Holy Mysteries, it is best to come for the confession after the evening service on the previous night.

You must be truly sorry for the sins you have committed. Unless you really regret having done them, and intend to try to avoid them in the future, you lack true penitence, without which your sins are not forgiven.

It is also necessary to confess with faith in Jesus Christ and to trust in His mercy. Only if we believe and trust in Jesus Christ can we receive remission of our sins. Judas Iscariot, for example, repented of his sin, not before one man, but before all, and he returned the pieces of silver. But instead of believing in Jesus Christ and trusting in His mercy, he fell into despair and, receiving no remission, he died a terrible death. Thus, in addition to careful confession and true repentance, faith and hope are essential for the salvation of a sinner.

Penances (Epitemia) — Their Nature and Purpose

Penance is a form of discipline or a prohibition administered by the priest (in accordance with the canons or laws of the Church) to those repentant Christians for whom it is necessary, much as a doctor prescribes a suitable medicine or treatment. It is a form of treatment for a moral sickness. Examples of penances are: fasting over and above what is required of all Orthodox Christians, special prayers of repentance with prostrations, reading books which will help in overcoming one's weakness, and the performance of good works.

Penances are not given to all who come to confession, but only to those who, by the nature or seriousness of their sins, require this special medicine. An example of this is St. Paul's excommunication of a Christian of the Church of Corinth for incest; then, because of his penitence, he received him back into the Church (II Cor. 2:6-8).

Although penance would seem to be a punishment, its purpose is not to make retribution for sins, to pay back a debt, but is rather corrective, medicinal, and instructive—to cure the sinner from his sinful habits, to instruct him regarding both the harmful nature of what he has been doing, and ways to change his life, so that he shall not repeat his sin. Penance is intended to deepen and increase the penitent's regret for what he has done, and to strengthen the desire of his will for correction. The Apostle says, "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of" (II Cor. 7:10). This is upheld by the canons of the Ecumenical Councils and the teaching of the Fathers, who describe penance as a means of spiritual treatment to cure the diseases of the soul. The 102nd canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council says: "The character of a sin must be considered from all points and conversion expected. And so let mercy be meted out."

Moral Guidance or "The Opening of One's Thoughts"

It is necessary to distinguish between the mystery of confession itself, and the moral guidance of a spiritual father in "the opening of thoughts" which is still used, especially in some monastic communities, but is something quite different from confession. The telling of one's thoughts and actions before a spiritual elder, from whom one seeks moral guidance, has a vast psychological significance. It is very useful for moral training, the correction of bad inclinations and habits, and the overcoming of doubts and indecisiveness. In some monasteries this is practiced daily, but it is not a course to be entered upon lightly. Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov says, "An indispensable condition of such submission is a Spirit-bearing guide, who by the will of the Spirit can mortify the fallen will of the person subject to him in the Lord, and can mortify all the passions as well." And he issues dire warnings about heeding "Elders" falsely so-called. Nonetheless, some writers (notably Prof. Andreyev) suggest that some form of "opening of the thoughts" can form part of Christian family life, so that husband and wife open their thoughts to each other each day. Of course such a practice is far removed from the spiritual discipline of Eldership of which Bishop Ignatius writes. Either way, this type of spiritual guidance, although very beneficial when rightly ordered, does not have the significance of a mystery or grace-bearing Church rite like confession, which is why confession itself, the sacrament of penitence, can take place only before a priest.

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A Prayer before Confession
St. Symeon the New Theologian

O God and Lord of all! Who hath the power over every breath and soul, the only One able to heal me, hearken unto the prayer of me, the wretched one, and, having put him to death, destroy the serpent nestling within me by the descent of the All-Holy and Life-Creating Spirit. And vouchsafe me, poor and naked of all virtue, to fall with tears at the feet of my spiritual father, and call his holy soul to mercy, to have mercy on me. And grant, O Lord, unto my heart humility and good thoughts, becoming a sinner, who hath consented to repent unto Thee, and do not abandon unto the end the one soul, which hath united itself unto Thee and hath confessed Thee, and instead of all the world hath chosen Thee and hath preferred Thee. For Thou knowest, O Lord, that I want to save myself, and that my evil habit is an obstacle. But all things are possible unto Thee, O Master, which are impossible for man. Amen.

Prayer After Confession

O Lord of mercy! Through Thy gracious goodness, my conscience is now unburdened of sins which oppressed me, and in the humblest manner of which I am capable, I revealed to Thy priest all my sins that I could recollect. I humbly beseech Thee: accept this confession and forgive me all my trespasses, those which I have forgotten, as well as those I have remembered. Grant me grace, Lord, to live more carefully hereafter and to refrain from my former vices, which I utterly detest. I firmly resolve never to be guilty of them, but especially my most bountiful and merciful Savior, enable me to withstand those temptations with which I am most troubled, and to avoid all occasions for offending Thee again. If a just man falls seven times in the day, how much more reason have I to fear for myself, O Lord, and dread that I shall not be steadfast in my resolution, having through my own frailty and vicious habits increased the natural blindness and weakness in which I was born.

Yet, O Lord, I firmly resolve through Thy merciful assistance, never to consent to any mortal sin, from which I humbly beseech Thee to preserve me while I live; as to my other sins and imperfections, I resolve to stand up against them and hope, through Thy goodness, at length to avoid them. Amen.

On Repentance by St. John of Kronstadt

"If you fall, rise and you shall be saved." You are a sinner, you continually fall, learn also how to rise; be careful to acquire this wisdom. This is what the wisdom consists in: learning by heart the psalm, "Have mercy upon me, O God, after Thy great goodness," inspired by the Holy Spirit to the king and prophet David, and say it with sincere faith and trust, with a contrite and humble heart. After your sincere repentance, expressed in the words of King David, the forgiveness of your sins shall immediately shine upon you from the Lord, and your spiritual powers will be at peace. The most important thing in life is to be zealous for mutual love, and not to judge anyone. Everybody shall answer for himself to God, and you must look to yourself. Beware of malice.



Excerpts from the diary of St. John of Kronstadt

Remember the abyss of the Saviour's mercy and love to mankind. The Devil will represent the Lord's face to you as terrible and unmerciful, rejecting your prayer and repentance; but remember the Saviour's own words, full of every hope and boldness for us: "Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out;" [337] and "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden" — with sins and iniquities, and the wiles and calumnies of the Devil — "and I will give you rest." [338]

Everyone busies himself about elegant and clean clothing for the body, everyone tries to dress with taste and elegance, but who thinks of the incorruptible raiment, which is all defiled with sins, and in which we all shall have to appear before God the Judge? Who washes it with tears of repentance, with works of mercy, adorns it by fasting, prayer, watchfulness, and pious meditation?

I thank Thee, Lord, for bestowing new life upon me each time, when, with tears of repentance and gratitude, I celebrate the Divine Liturgy and partake of Thy most pure and life-giving Mysteries.

How easily and speedily the Lord can save us! — instantaneously, unexpectedly, imperceptibly. Often during the day I have been a great sinner, and at night, after prayer, I have gone to rest, justified and whiter than snow by the grace of the Holy Spirit, with the deepest peace and joy in my heart! How

easy it will be for the Lord to save us too in the evening of our life, at the decline of our days! O! save, save, save me, most gracious Lord; receive me in Thy heavenly Kingdom! Everything is possible to Thee.

To repent means to feel in our hearts the falsehood, the madness, the guilt of our sins, it means to acknowledge that we have offended, by them, our Creator, our Lord, our Father and Benefactor, Who is infinitely holy, and infinitely abhors sin, it means, to desire, with the whole soul, to amend and to expiate our sins.

Why does not the sinful soul obtain remission of its sins before it feels all their foolishness, all their destructiveness, and all their falsity from the whole heart? Because the heart is our soul; as it committed the sins, finding them at the time pleasant and plausible, therefore it must now repent of them and recognise them as leading to destruction and entirely wrong. This repentance is accomplished painfully in the heart, as the desire to sin is also usually in the heart.

To what end do fasting and penitence lead? For what purpose is this trouble taken? They lead to the cleansing of the soul from sins, to peace of heart, to union with God; they fill us with devotion and sonship, and give us boldness before God. There are, indeed, very important reasons for fasting and for confession from the whole heart. There shall be an inestimable reward given for conscientious labour.

If you sin in any way before God (and we sin every day greatly), immediately say in your heart, with faith in the Lord, who hears the sobs of your heart, with the humble acknowledgment and feeling of your sins, the Psalm: "Have mercy upon me, O God, after Thy great goodness;" and say the whole Psalm heartily. If it does not take effect the first time, try again, only say it still more heartily, still more feelingly, and then salvation and peace of soul shall speedily shine upon you from the Lord. Thus be always contrite; this is the true proved remedy against sins. If still you do not obtain relief, blame yourself. It shows that you have prayed without contrition, without humility of heart, without a strong desire to obtain forgiveness of sins from God; it shows that you are not deeply grieved at your sin.

Have many of us the feeling of sonlike love to God?

Dare many of us, without condemnation and with boldness call upon the Father in Heaven and say: "Our Father"...? Is there not, on the contrary, no such sonlike voice to be heard in our hearts, which are deadened by the vanities of this world and attachments to its objects and pleasures? Is not our Heavenly Father far from our hearts? Is it not rather an avenging God that we should represent to ourselves, we who have withdrawn ourselves from Him into a far-away land? Yes, by our sins all of us are worthy of His righteous anger and punishment, and it is wonderful how long-suffering and forbearing He is to us — that He does not strike us like the barren fig trees. Let us hasten to propitiate Him by repentance and tears. Let us enter into ourselves; let us consider our unclean hearts in all strictness, and when we see what a multitude of impurities are keeping them from the reach of Divine grace, we shall ourselves acknowledge that we are spiritually dead.

It is said: "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." [402] Is at hand — that is, it has come by itself. It is not necessary to seek for it long — it seeks us, our free inclination; that is, you yourself must repent with heartfelt contrition.

Concerning penitence. Penitence should be sincere, perfectly free, and not in any way forced by any particular time and habit, or by the person before whom the sinner confesses. Otherwise it would not be true penitence.

Consciousness, memory, imagination, feeling, and will are helps to penitence. As we sin with all the powers of our soul, so penitence must be from our whole soul. Penitence in words only, without the intention of amendment and without the feeling of contrition, may be called hypocritical.

Take the trouble to spend only one single day according to God's commandments, and you will see yourself, you will feel by your own heart, how good it is to fulfil God's will (and God's will in relation to us is our life, our eternal blessedness). Love God with all your heart at least as much as you love your father, your mother, and your benefactors; value with all your strength His love and His benefits to you (go over them mentally in your heart, think how He gave you existence and with it all good things, how endlessly long He bears with your sins, how endlessly He forgives you them; for the sake of your hearty repentance, by virtue of the suffering and death upon the Cross of His only-begotten Son, what blessedness He has promised you in eternity, if you are faithful to Him); enumerate besides His mercies, which are endlessly great and manifold.

Let us fear hardened insensibility to our sins; let us fear the pride of our hearts, which says: "I do not need any forgiveness of sins; I am not guilty, I am not sinful"; or else: "My sins are trifling, they are only human ones" as though it were necessary that they should be diabolical; or: "I do not feel amiss living in my sins." This is the pride of Satan, and it is Satan himself speaking these words in our hearts. Let us feel deeply, deeply, with our whole hearts, our innumerable iniquities; let us sigh for them from the very depths of our souls; let us shed tears of contrition for them, in order to propitiate to mercy the Master, Whom we have angered. Let us not in the least justify ourselves like the Pharisees, the hypocrites: "For in Thy sight," it is said, "shall no man living be justified;" [858] and we can only propitiate God to be merciful unto us by sincere repentance for our sins. Let us put aside indifference and coldness; let us labour unto the Lord with a fervent spirit. Do not let us forget that we have now come to propitiate the Master of our lives and our righteous Judge for a long period of our sinful lives. Is this, therefore, a time for any coldness and indifference, which are not approved of even in social intercourse, in our relations with our fellow-men? Ought not our soul, on the contrary, to be turned into a spiritual fire, and pour itself forth in tears of most heartfelt repentance? O, my God, my God! our iniquities have literally increased beyond the number of the hairs of our heads, above the number of the sand of the sea, and yet we do not feel them, we are indifferent to them; we even do not cease to love them. "If Thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" [859] Grant, Lord, unto us all a contrite spirit and a humble heart, so that we may offer to Thee true penitence. Amen.

How can the kingdom of God come to a man during his present life? Through hearty repentance. "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.", [154] Let the impious man then give up his godless opinions, the mercenary his love of money, the deceiver his deceitfulness, the drunkard his drinking, the glutton his gluttony, the dissolute his dissipation, the proud his pride, the vain his vanity, the envious, the insatiable, his envy and his insatiableness, the impatient and murmurer his impatience and murmuring, and let everyone learn to do the acts of Christian love, and especially "to bear the infirmities of the weak." [155]

Our Lord is mightier than the Devil. If the Devil still lives and works in our hearts through our attachments to earthly things, then how shall not Christ enter into our heart, through faith and repentance, when it was created to be the temple of God?

Pronounce the words of the prayer with heartfelt firmness. When praying in the evening, do not forget to confess in prayer to the Holy Spirit with all sincerity and contrition, those sins into which you have fallen during the past day. A few moments of fervent repentance, and you will be cleansed by the Holy Spirit from every impurity; you will be whiter than snow, and tears, purifying the heart will flow from

your eyes; you will be covered with the garment of Christ's righteousness and united to Him, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

What would it have been if God's preventive grace had not been bestowed upon us; if it did not unexpectedly, suddenly embrace all our being after we have sinned, and incline our hearts to repentance and tears? What if it had been left to us to obtain it by our own efforts only? How accursed would we men then have been! Few, very few, could have been delivered from the burden of their sins, for our nature is slothful in exerting itself to effort, especially in the spiritual life; and without help, without powerful facility and the delights of spiritual labours, it would have abandoned them, and would have thrown aside the work of its salvation. But now God, the Most Wise and Merciful Father, sometimes lightens and sweetens our spiritual burden, sometimes makes it heavier for our trial, to teach us patience, and to weaken our crafty, destructive flesh, wisely changing the one by the other; and the work of our salvation, thank God, is thus always made possible — not too difficult, and very often pleasant to us.

It is only necessary to represent to yourself and firmly believe that the Holy Spirit is everywhere, in every place; that He is an incomplex Being, that in Him all heaven is near us, as upon the palm of the hand, with all its angels and saints, so that we have only to call upon the Lord, or upon the Virgin Mother of God, or any saint from the depth of the heart, with clear-sighted faith, with heartfelt repentance for the sins by which we are bound by the enemy or by which we have bound voluntarily ourselves — and our salvation will immediately shine forth. Marvellous is the saving power of our Lady; it flows into the heart like a healing balsam, or like fragrant, life-giving air, or like calming water. Only look on Her with the eyes of your heart, trusting in Her mercy and help.

I thank Thee, my Lord, my Master, and my Judge, for teaching me how to pray simply to Thee, for hearing my calling upon Thee, for saving me from my sins and sorrows, and for rightly directing my ways. I called upon Thee (in the sin of my wickedness) in the words of the church prayer: "O, Lord, our God, Who grantest forgiveness unto men through repentance" And as soon as I finished this prayer, peace and lightness established themselves in my soul.

Sins are secret serpents, gnawing at the heart of a man and all his being; they do not let him rest, they continually suck his heart; sins are prickly thorns, constantly goring the soul; sins are spiritual darkness. Those who repent must bring forth the fruits of repentance.

I love to pray in God's temple, especially within the holy altar, before the Holy Table or the Prothesis, for by God's grace I become wonderfully changed in the temple. During the prayer of repentance and devotion the thorns, the bonds of the passions, fall from my soul, and I feel so light; all the spell, all the enticement of the passions vanish, and I seem to die to the world, and the world, with all its blessings, dies for me. I live in God and for God, for God alone. I am wholly penetrated by Him, and am one spirit with Him. I become like a child soothed on its mother's knee. Then my heart is full of most heavenly, sweet peace. My soul is enlightened by the light of heaven. At such times we see everything clearly; we look upon everything rightly; we feel friendship and love towards everyone, even towards our enemies, readily excusing and forgiving everyone. O, how blessed is the soul when it is with God! Truly the Church is earthly paradise.

If you experience a feeling of hunger or thirst, and wish to eat and drink, think of the hunger or thirst of the soul (it thirsts after righteousness, for justification, Christ, for sanctification), which, if you do not satisfy, your soul may die from hunger, crushed by the passions, weakened and exhausted; and in satisfying your bodily hunger, do not forget to appease, above all and before all, your spiritual hunger,

by conversing with God, by heart-felt repentance for your sins, by reading the story and precepts of the Gospel, and especially by the communion of the Divine Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Christ. If you are fond of dressing elegantly, or when you put on your clothes, think of the incorruptible garment of righteousness, in which our souls should be arrayed, or of Jesus Christ Who is our spiritual raiment, as it is said: "For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ, have put on Christ." [703] A passion for dress often entirely thrusts out from the heart the very thought of the incorruptible raiment of the soul, and turns the whole life into vain care about elegance in dress.

Nothing in the world is more important than the salvation of human souls, and there is no subject more worthy of unceasing and perpetual remembrance than the redemption of the world by the Son of God from sin, the curse and eternal death. The Holy Church has engraved in her Divine services, by means of eternally indelible letters, by images and rites, the whole ordering of our salvation, in order that men — so inclined to forget God, and the salvation of their souls, and all that God has done for their salvation, eternal joy and bliss — should constantly have, so to say, before their eyes, and as though within their reach, all God's great, most wise and good deeds concerning them, and that they may continually be urged to repentance, amendment, and salvation, and shun the vanities of this corrupt and fleeting world. "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." [979]

Do not forget yourself in looking upon the bodily face — look more attentively with your inward vision upon the face of your soul, what aspect it wears: is it not disfigured by the passions? and if so, destroy this disfigurement by prayer and tearful repentance. Do not forget yourself in looking upon beautiful raiment: it is corruption; but consider the incorruptible raiment of your soul, in what state it is: is it not hideous and impure, owing to frequent transgressions, both secret and evident; and strive to clothe your soul in the imperishable beauty of meekness, humility, chastity and purity, mercy and righteousness.

Afflictions are a great teacher; afflictions show us our weaknesses, passions, and the need of repentance; afflictions cleanse the soul, they make it sober, as from drunkenness, they bring down grace into the soul, they soften the heart, they inspire us with a loathing for sin, and strengthen us in faith, hope, and virtue.

As God is a thinking Being, it is extremely easy to lose Him from the heart; and it is equally easy to regain Him in the heart by means of steadfast repentance.

Wonderful is the power of faith! Only the lively thought of God only heartfelt faith in Him is required, and He is with me; only hearty repentance for sins, with faith in Him, is required, and He is with me; one good thought, and He is with me; a pious feeling, and He is with me.

"He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him." [1117] This we feel, and experience confirms it. Most blessed, most full of life is the man who communicates of the Holy Mysteries with faith and heartfelt repentance for his sins. This we truly feel, and the contrast is also manifest. If we approach the Holy Cup without sincere repentance for sin, and with doubt, then Satan enters into us, and dwells in us, destroying our soul, and this, too, is most perceptible.

For the sake of our faith alone, the spiritual mountains — that is, the heights and burdens of sins — are removed. This is why, when Christians release themselves from the burden of their sins by repentance and confession, they sometimes say, "Thank God, a mountain has fallen off my shoulders!"

May the infinite love and mercy of the Lord triumph, in consequence of our sincere recognition and confession of our sins; and may the sinful flattery of the Devil, teaching us to conceal our sins and not to acknowledge them, be covered with shame! May all the snares and bonds of the Devil be torn asunder by our repentance, like a cobweb! The Devil seeks that we should conceal our sins, and thus give ourselves up to them in secret still more and more easily; but let us even here destroy his snares and wiles; let us confess our sins, in order that we ourselves and all others may see to what abomination we are giving ourselves up or have given ourselves up, and that thus, by recognising this abomination, we may more easily amend. "Tell," it is said, "all thine iniquities," and do not be silent about them, "that thou mayest be justified."

"The Lord turned and looked upon Peter . . . and Peter went out, and wept bitterly." [1309] And even now, when the Lord looks upon us we weep bitterly over our sins. Yes, our tears during prayer mean that the Lord has looked upon us with His gaze, that gives life to everything and trieth the hearts and reins. Ah! the soul is sometimes entangled and ensnared by sins, like a bird in the net! We do not sometimes see any outlet from our sins, and they torment us; the heart sometimes feels terribly anxious and sorrowful on account of them; but "Jesus looks upon us, and streams of tears flow from our eyes, and with the tears all the tissue of evil in our soul vanishes; we weep and rejoice that such mercy has been suddenly and unexpectedly sent to us; what warmth we then feel in our heart, and what lightness, as though we could fly up to the Lord God Himself! I thank the Lord with all my heart for freely forgiving all my sin! [1310]

For what purpose does the Lord add day after day, year after year, to our existence? In order that we may gradually put away, cast aside, evil from our souls, each one his own, and acquire blessed simplicity; in order that we may become, for instance, gentle as lambs, simple as infants; in order that we may learn not to have the least attachment to earthly things, but like loving, simple children, may cling with all our hearts to God alone, and love Him with, all our hearts, all our souls, all our strength, and all our thoughts, and our neighbour as ourselves. Let us hasten; therefore, to pray to the Lord, fervently and tearfully, to grant us simplicity of heart, and let us strive by every means to cast out the evil from our souls — for instance, evil suspiciousness, malevolence, malignity, malice, pride, arrogance, boastfulness, scornfulness, impatience, despondency, despair, irascibility and irritability, tearfulness and faintheartedness, envy, avarice, gluttony, and satiety; fornication, mental and of the heart, and actual fornication; the love of money, and in general the passion for acquisition; slothfulness, disobedience, and all the dark horde of sins. Lord, without Thee we can do nothing! Bless us Thyself in this work, and give us the victory over our enemies and our passions. So be it!

[154] *St. Matthew iii. 2.*

[155] *Romans xv. 1.*

[337] *St. John vi. 37.*

[338] *St. Matthew xi. 28.*

[402] *St. Matthew iv. 7.*

[858] *Psalm cxliii. 2.*

[859] *Psalm cxxx. 3.*

[979] *1 John ii. 17.*

[1117] *St. John vi. 56.*

[1309] *St. Luke xxii. 61, 62.*

[1310] *Psalm ciii. 3.*

We Return to God



To Parents:

This booklet is designed to help you prepare your child for Confession. We recommend that you read the entire booklet yourself before going through its contents with your child. After your child has participated in the Sacrament several times, he can make the necessary preparation himself with the aid of this booklet. Parents may find it necessary, however, to periodically remind the child to prepare for Confession and provide the conditions to make it possible for the child to have a quiet time and place to do this. Above all, it is important that a loving, understanding attitude be part of the parents' role in assisting the child to receive this Sacrament. An absence of fear and an assurance of trust in God as a loving Father who wants to forgive us are the best conditions for leading a child to the Sacrament of Penance.

We Return to God

*A Manual for
Preparing Children for the
Sacrament of Penance*

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

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To the Parents

Your child is now at the stage of religious development when he/she is being introduced to Confession which is the Sacrament of Penance. It is essential that you, the parents, understand the meaning of this unique event and help your child in preparing for it.

1. *Why is the Sacrament of Penance needed?*

Penance is necessary because each one of us constantly *sins*, i.e. betrays and rejects the grace of Christian life given us in Baptism. Sins separate us from God, darken our consciousness, undermine our will, make us slaves of passions, moods, temptations. And just as we must wash ourselves in order to be clean, we must repent for our sins, acknowledge them before God, receive His forgiveness and have a "new start" — in peace with Him and with our fellow men.

2. *Why should we confess our sins to the Priest and not simply to God Himself?*

Because it is from and through the Church that we receive the knowledge of God and His Commandments, the grace of salvation and the joy of new life, and, it is the Priest who represents the Church. He has received, through ordination, the power "to loose and to bind." A real repentance begins with overcoming our shame. The Priest can help us to detect sins of which we are not aware. He can, in Christ's name, absolve our sins and reconcile us with the Church. Finally, he must instruct us in God's ways after we have decided to lead a better life.

3. *How should we prepare ourselves for Confession?*

By evaluating our daily life, our thoughts and acts, our desires and our imaginations in the light of Christ's commandments; by asking God to help us in seeing our own sins; by "repenting" — i.e. regretting our evil deeds and desiring to change and to improve our lives; by concentrating our minds on the ultimate goal and meaning of life: salvation for life eternal in and with God.

4. *What is the unique significance of the first Confession?*

The first confession means that the child has become capable of moral responsibility for his acts and can fulfill the main commandment which is to discern between what is good and what is evil. If properly prepared for it, the child will always remember that a Christian must always *choose* the right way, fight the evil and refer his whole behavior to God's commandments.

5. *How can the parents help prepare the child for the first Confession?*

By helping the child to ask the questions about his life: about praying, being good to other people, selfishness, disobedience, etc.; by creating at home an atmosphere of peace and concentration (no TV set, etc.); by reading together with the child selected passages from the Gospel; and by helping him to "organize" his confession.

In the following pages, there is an introduction to the Sacrament of Penance for the child. It includes some selected passages from Scripture that present essential attitudes for repentance, forgiveness, etc. In addition, there are selected prayers that can be said before Confession, and before and after receiving Holy Communion. Finally, there are some practical guides for the preparation for Confession and for the Rite of Confession itself. You may help your child to read this material and to prepare for his first and subsequent confessions, until such time as he is able to do the reading and preparing for Confession himself.

FATHER ALEXANDER SCHMEMANN

Coming to God

Do you remember the first time you realized that you had done something wrong? How did you feel? Most of us, when we do something wrong, want to correct it right away. We feel very bad as long as we know things aren't just right. If we have hurt or angered someone else, we want him to forgive us. If we have disobeyed our parents, we want them still to love us. But usually, it is up to us to make things right again. It is up to us to say, "I'm sorry" or "forgive me" or to admit we were wrong. The wonderful thing that usually happens when we do admit our wrongs is that things *are* made right again. We do feel again that things are good and that we really do live together with other people in love.

The person who loves us more than anyone else is God. He loves us more than we can ever know. He never stops loving us, even if we stop loving Him or forget to live in a good way as His children. But God does want us to be *good* children; He does want us to obey Him and to love others as He loves us.

Jesus used many stories to tell people how much God loves them and wants to forgive them when they behave badly. He showed us how God helps us to come back to Him after we have forgotten Him or forgotten to live as His children. These stories of Jesus are read in Church from the Holy Gospel just before Great Lent begins. They help us to remember how God wants us to live so that we can try again during Lent to return to God's life. These are the lessons, if you want to read them in your Bible:

1. The story of *Zacchaeus*, the small man who really *wanted to see Christ*. He was a rich tax collector and was not well liked. But he wanted so much to see Jesus, he climbed a tree to get a better look, even though this probably made him look foolish to other people. Christ saw him and came to his house. Zacchaeus was sorry he had treated others badly. He promised to give half of his money and goods to the poor and to repay four times anyone whom he had cheated. Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house." (LUKE 19:1-10)

2. The story of the *Publican and the Pharisee*, the *humble sinner* and the *proud man*. In this story, Jesus shows us the picture of two men. The Pharisee was a proud man who was very pleased with himself because he followed all the rules of the Church and bragged to God about how good he was. The Publican who was a sinner, knew how bad he was and simply said to God: "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" Jesus tells us that only the man who knows he has sinned and asks God to forgive him will be given a place in heaven. (LUKE 18:9-14)
3. The story of the *Prodigal Son*, who *returned to his father*, after he realized that he had wasted his money and sinned against God and his father. In this story, Jesus compares the Prodigal Son and his father to our life with God our Father. Only if we see how we have wasted the gifts God has given to us, only if we are sorry that we have sinned against God and other men, can we finally return to God ourselves. We must return to God our Father and confess our sinfulness. But God, just as the father of the Prodigal Son, truly loves us and is waiting to welcome us back to give us a place in His Kingdom. (LUKE 15:11-32)

4. The story of the *Last Judgment*, where God will judge all of us according to how much *love* we have shown to other men. Jesus tells us that we must treat everyone with love, just as we would treat Jesus Himself if He came to us. Those who are good and kind to all men, even strangers, will be welcomed into God's Kingdom. If we are not good to others, we shall face His judgment and eternal punishment. (MATTHEW 25:31-46)
5. The lesson on *Forgiveness* in which Jesus tells us that we must *forgive each other* as God forgives us, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you." In this lesson, He tells us also to fast "in secret" — in such a way that we do not "show off" that we are fasting. God knows all that we do and will reward us if we do His will. (MATTHEW 6:14-21)

In these few lessons, we learn what is important if we wish to *return to God*. We must:

1. Really want to be with God and try to live as His good children.
2. Try to see how we have sinned and be ready to confess our sins to God.
3. Try to understand that God wants us to be with Him, to enjoy His love and all good things He has created for us. And, when we have forgotten God and behaved badly, to return to Him in the Sacrament of Penance (Confession), to ask Him to forgive us and welcome us back into His love.
4. Try to treat everyone with kindness and love, so that at the Final Judgment, God will choose to have us with Him in His Heavenly Kingdom.
5. Try to forgive others, as we would like God to forgive us, and obey the commandments of God.

In Confession, you will be coming to God to tell Him you are sorry for sinning against Him and against other people. God will welcome you and receive you with love. He will welcome you back into His House. He will give you the food of new life, in Holy Communion, so that you may live forever with Him in His Kingdom.

In the next few pages, you will find questions to help you think about how well or how badly you have behaved. You will find prayers that should be said before Confession, and prayers that should be said before and after receiving Holy Communion. These can be read together with other members of your family who are preparing for Confession and Communion. Most importantly, try to spend enough time quietly by yourself, or with your parents, preparing for your Confession. In this way, you will be easily able to tell God and the priest how you have behaved, and the priest, in turn, will be better able to help you to live a better life as a good child of God.

Preparing for Confession

These are some of the things you can do to get ready before coming to Confession:

1. Think about how you have behaved, what you have done wrong, and how you can be better. Use the list of *Questions to Think About* to help you remember how you may have disobeyed God and your family and friends. Do not use the list only; try to look at your own life to see other ways in which you may have sinned.
2. Read, if you can, the *Prayers before Confession* — at home or in Church.
3. When you come to the Church, first say your prayers, then wait for the priest to come out to hear your confession. The priest will stand by a table on which there will be a Gospel or a Cross, or both. Go up to the priest, kiss the Gospel and Cross. The

priest will tell you in a few words how he wants you to confess your sins. Try to remember the *main ways* in which you have been disobedient or have behaved badly. When you are finished, the priest will talk to you and help you to see how you can live in a better way.

4. When you have nothing more to confess and have asked God to forgive you, then kneel before the table. The Priest will place his *epitrakhil* (stole) on your head and pray to God to forgive you for your sins. After he has finished the prayer and made the blessing upon your head, stand, make the sign of the Cross and kiss the Gospel or Cross again. The priest will give you his blessing and you can then return to your place in the Church.

Questions to Think About before Coming to Confession

A few days or at least the evening before we come to Confession, we should sit down and carefully think about the ways in which we have behaved toward God, toward our family and friends, and even toward ourselves. As we look at our lives, we should try to keep in mind the ways in which we have sinned — if we have been disobedient, if we have hurt or angered others, or if we have done anything which would keep us away from God's love and God's life.

Here are some questions which you can ask yourself; try to see the ways in which you have behaved well or badly.

I. How have I behaved towards God?

Did I pray to Him everyday?

Did I thank Him? — in the morning, at meals, in the evening, or whenever I remembered how good He has been to me?

Have I used words which use the Name of God in a bad way?

Have I really loved God and tried to live as He wants me to live, or do I easily forget Him and forget to follow His Commandments?

II. How have I behaved towards my family and friends?

Have I remembered my family, my friends and all people who need God in my prayers?

Have I been good to my parents and given them my love? Have I been honest with them and answered them truthfully whenever they asked me something? Or, have I lied to them? Have I been stubborn or disrespectful? Have I become angry? Have I disobeyed them? Have I been kind to my grandparents and to older people?

Have I been good to my brothers or sisters? Have I shared my things with them? Or, have I been selfish and taken everything for myself? Have I helped them? Have I done my share of my duties at home? Have I been mean to them or teased them?

Have I been good to my friends and teachers? Have I become angry, or selfish, or disrespectful? Have I taken something which doesn't belong to me? Have I been lazy in my schoolwork, or have I cheated in my work? Have I tried to help someone, even in some small way? Have I made fun of anyone? Have I tried to make new students feel at home, or, have I ignored them and played only with my old friends? Have I tried to make friends with someone who is lonely and doesn't have many friends?

Have I spoken badly about someone else? Have I been mean to anyone? Have I told lies about myself or about others?

Have I used in a good way the things that God, my family and friends have given to me? Have I treated my pets and other animals well? Have I treated other people's property in a good way?

III. How have I behaved towards myself?

Have I been responsible? — have I done things that other people have asked me to do: at home, in school, with groups of other people?

Have I boasted (or thought) about being better than other people?

Have I taken the advice from my parents and teachers about how to treat my own body in a good way — by getting enough sleep, eating the right kind of food, etc.

Am I often angry? Do I often want everything for myself? Am I jealous of other people? Am I lazy or stubborn?

Finally . . .

Am I truly sorry for my sins? Am I truly sorry for hurting others? Do I forgive others for hurting me?

Do I really *want to change* my habits and behave as God wants me to behave? Do I know what I must do to live in a better way as a good child of God?

Do I really know that God loves me and will help me change if I want to? Do I really believe that God is good and will forgive me and be with me?

Prayers before Confession

(Before you come to confess your sins to the Priest, you should say these prayers as part of your preparation for Confession. Sometimes these prayers may be said together in the Church if a group of people are going to Confession on the same day; if this is done, the Priest will usually lead you in your prayers.)

Priest: Blessed is our God always, now and ever and unto ages of ages.

(If there is no priest, begin by saying:
In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.)

AMEN.

O heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth who art everywhere and fillest all things. Treasury of Blessings, and Giver of Life: Come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every impurity, and save our souls, O Good One.

Holy God! Holy Mighty! Holy Immortal!
Have mercy on us.

Holy God! Holy Mighty! Holy Immortal!
Have mercy on us.

Holy God! Holy Mighty! Holy Immortal!
Have mercy on us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. AMEN.

O most-holy Trinity: have mercy on us.

O Lord: cleanse us from our sins.

O Master: pardon our transgressions.

O Holy One: visit and heal our infirmities, for Thy name's sake.

Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. AMEN.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.

Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Priest: For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory: of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages.

AMEN.

Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us, for laying aside all excuse, we sinners offer to Thee, as to our Master, this request: have mercy on us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

O Lord, have mercy on us, for in Thee have we put our trust. Do not be angry with us, nor remember our wicked deeds, but look down on us even now, since Thou art compassionate, and deliver us from our enemies; for Thou art our God, and we are Thy people; we are all the work of Thy hands, and we call on Thy name.

Now and ever and unto ages of ages. AMEN.

O blessed Theotokos, open the doors of compassion to us whose hope is in you, that we may not perish but be delivered from adversity through you, who are the salvation of the Christian people.

You may also read PSALM 51 in your Bibles.

Preparing for Holy Communion

1. Before you receive Holy Communion, you may read the *Prayers before Holy Communion* by yourself or with members of your family. Remember that you are to fast from the evening before and try to be at peace with all your family and friends. During this time, you can also think about how to live a better life, remembering the words of advice that the Priest gave to you.
2. After you have attended the Divine Liturgy and have received God's gift of Holy Communion, say a prayer of thanks to God, or read, if you can, at least one of the *Prayers of Thanksgiving* (in Church or at home). And most importantly, *begin* now to try to live a good life as one of God's children.

Prayers before Holy Communion

(After you have confessed your sins to the Priest, you may read the prayers on pages 24-25 (through "Our Father") as part of your preparation for Holy Communion. In addition, you should fast from the evening before, and be at peace with all your family and friends before you receive Holy Communion.)

Then, before coming to Communion say:

I believe, O Lord, and I confess that Thou art truly the Christ, the Son of the Living God, who camest into the world to save sinners, of whom I am first.

I believe also that this is truly Thine own most pure Body, and that this is truly Thine own precious Blood.

Therefore, I pray Thee; have mercy upon me and forgive my transgressions both voluntary and involuntary, of word and of deed, committed knowingly and unknowingly, of knowledge and of ignorance.

And make me worthy to partake without condemnation of Thy most pure Mysteries, for the remission of my sins, and unto life everlasting. AMEN.

Of Thy Mystical Supper, O Son of God, accept me today as a communicant; for I will not speak of Thy Mystery to Thine enemies, neither like Judas will I give Thee a kiss; but like the thief will I confess Thee:

Remember me, O Lord, in Thy Kingdom.

May the communion of Thy holy Mysteries be neither to my judgment, nor to my condemnation, O Lord, but to the healing of soul and body.

AMEN.

Prayers of Thanksgiving

(There are many prayers that can be said to thank God for giving us the gifts of new life in Holy Communion. Here are three prayers which you can say:)

O Master, Christ our God, King of the Ages,
Maker of all things:

I thank Thee for all the good things Thou hast
given me,
especially for the communion with Thy most
pure and life-creating Mysteries.

I pray Thee, O gracious Lover of Man:
preserve me under Thy protection, beneath
the shadow of Thy wings.

Enable me, even to my last breath, to par-
take worthily and with a pure conscience
of Thy holy things,
for the remission of sins and unto life eter-
nal.

For Thou art the Bread of Life, the Fountain
of Holiness, the Giver of all Good;
to Thee we ascribe glory, with the Father and
the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto
ages of ages. AMEN.

O Lord Jesus Christ our God: let Thy holy
Body be my eternal life;
Thy precious Blood, my remission of sins.
Let this Eucharist be my joy health, and
gladness.
Make me, a sinner, worthy to stand on the
right hand of Thy glory at Thine awesome
second Coming,
through the prayers of Thy most pure Mother
and of all the saints. AMEN.

We thank Thee
O Master who lovest mankind,
Benefactor of our souls,
that Thou hast made us worthy this day
of Thy heavenly and immortal mysteries.
Make straight our path;
strengthen us all in Thy fear;
guard our life;
make firm our steps;
through the prayers and intercessions
of the glorious Theotokos and ever-virgin
Mary, and of all Thy saints. Amen.

You can be guilty of the sin committed by another

1. By counsel (to give advice, one's opinion or instructions.)
2. By command (to demand, to order, such as in the military.)
3. By consent (to give permission, to approve, to agree to.)
4. By provocation (to dare.)
5. By praise or flattery (to cheer, to applaud, to commend.)
6. By concealment (to hide the action, to cover-up.)
7. By partaking (to take part, to participate.)
8. By silence (by playing dumb, by remaining quiet.)
9. By defense of the ill done (to justify, to argue in favour.)